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THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH



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THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH



BY

JOHN BLACK ATKINS

AUTHOR OF "THE WAR IN CUBA"

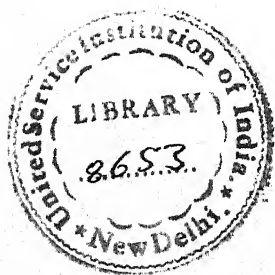
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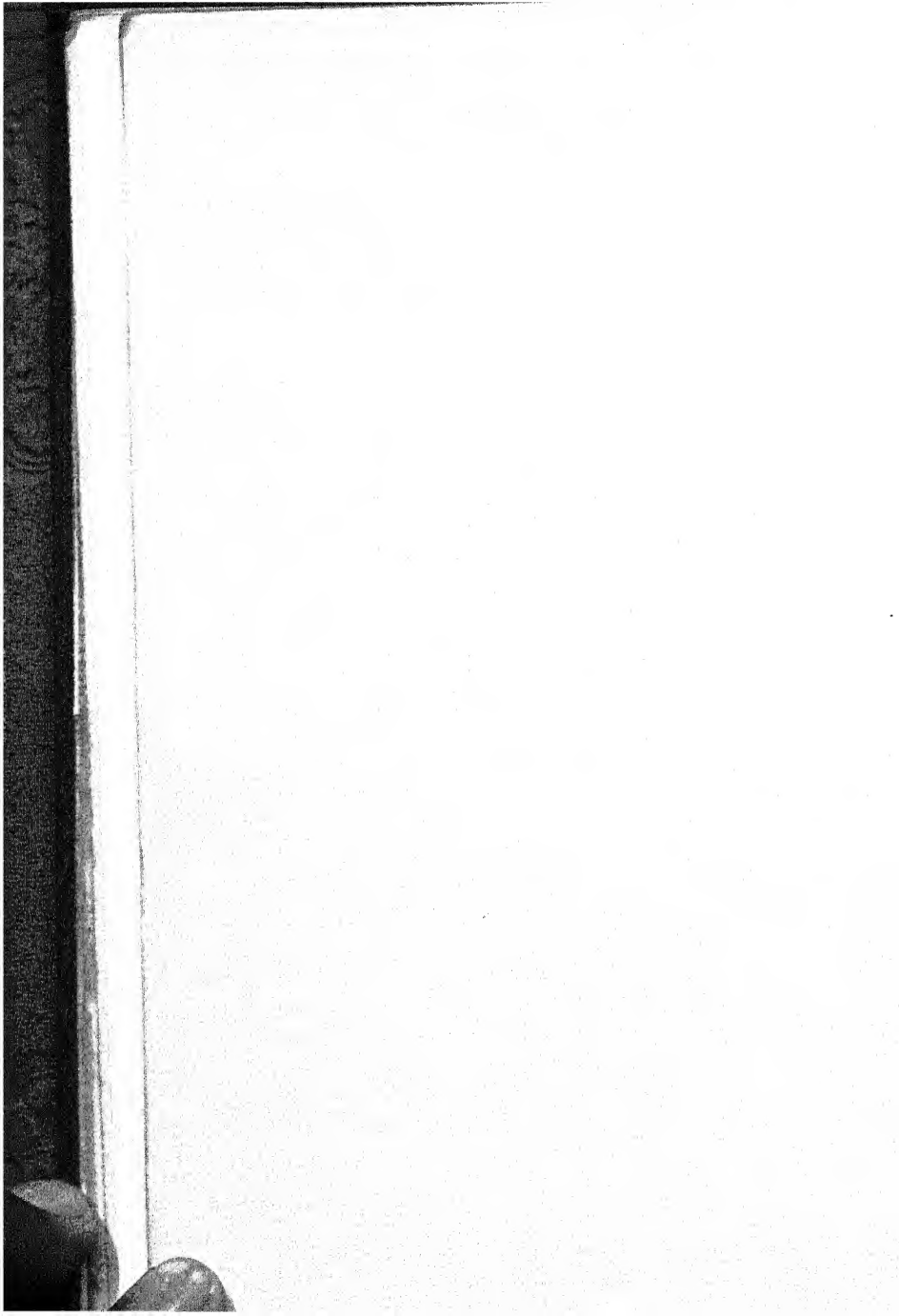
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TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER



PREFACE

I AM indebted to the proprietors of the *Manchester Guardian* for permission to reproduce the following letters and several of the plans and sketches which illustrate them. I have thought it better to leave the letters as nearly as possible in their original form ; they are simply unofficial dispatches, written in camp under all the difficulties that oppress the pen in the neighbourhood of the sword. If in speculations or assertions I have gone astray, I venture to let the mistakes stand. The reader, recognising them, will allow them a certain historical value as the common beliefs of the moment, or will pin his faith to them only until he finds them rebuked in later chapters. In this way the letters may perhaps preserve an "actuality" of which industry might rob them ; if the reader perseveres he will, I hope, find sooner

or later the natural explanation of every error, and the campaign will unfold itself before his eye as it did before my own. The letters, with the introduction contributed by one of my colleagues, form a continuous narrative of events from the beginning of the war to the relief of Ladysmith.

J. B. A.

LADYSMITH, *March 4*, 1900

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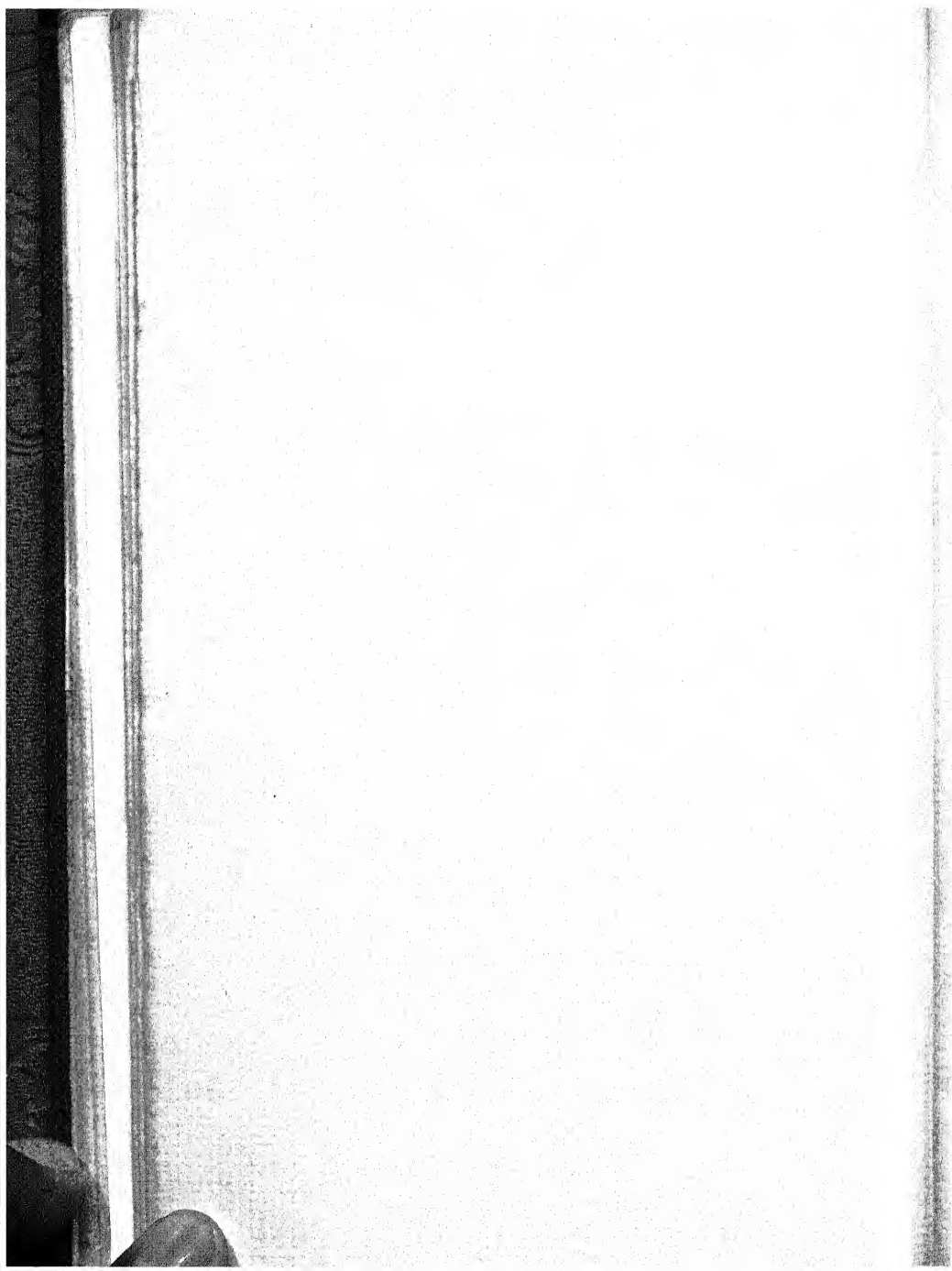
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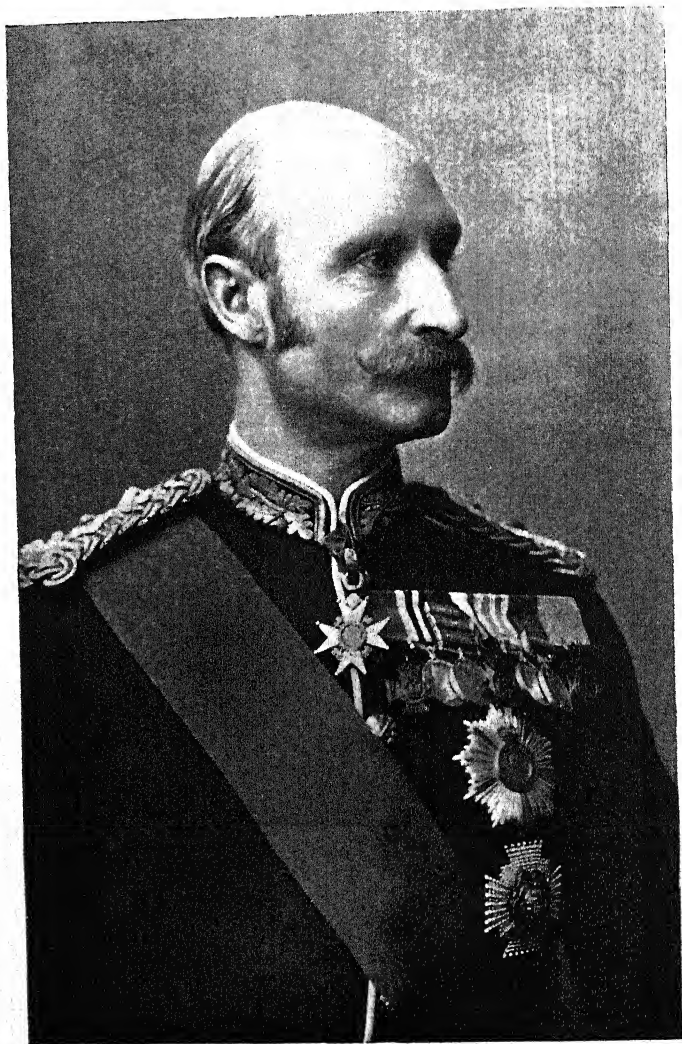
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GENERAL SIR GEORGE STEWART WHITE, V.C., G.C.I.E., G.C.B., G.C.S.I.



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INTRODUCTION

HOW LADYSMITH CAME TO BE BESIEGED

30

LITTLE anxiety was felt in England on the outbreak of war. We should make no headway (the more cautious said) until the arrival of the Army Corps, but we should at least hold our own unless it were at Mafeking. The Boers, it was thought, had let slip their opportunity. Had they sent their ultimatum a month earlier, they might have lost an excuse for war, but they would certainly have conquered a colony. Happily, Natal was no longer defenceless. Sir George White was there in command of one of the finest armies ever seen in South Africa. The military authorities had had ample warning, and there were no beleaguered garrisons at Potchefstroom or Pretoria, as in the last war, to tempt them to generous rashness. If Sir George Colley had sought to

force Laing's Nek and invade the Transvaal with an army of fourteen hundred men, what fear was there that Sir George White would not hold his own with fourteen thousand, and these disposed presumably for the purposes of scientific defence, some fifty miles to the rear of our headquarters in the last war? Only a very few in England troubled to inquire further into the facts, and the feeling of security was strengthened by the first reports of Dundee and Elandslaagte. The retreat from Dundee was, for most of us in England, the first unmistakable proof that our dispositions in Northern Natal were unsound. A little later Nicholson's Nek converted the field army for the defence of Natal into the garrison of an unimportant town, and Colenso put all Englishmen in the fear of a great military calamity, a fear which tightened its grip upon us as week succeeded week and Ladysmith was still unrelieved.

It is easy now to read the warnings of the map. A better field than Natal for the operations of the allies could not have been designed. No other British colony has two frontiers, one with the Transvaal and another with the Orange Free State, nowhere else could the allies, advancing

each from his own base, combine in a simultaneous forward movement. The ground, moreover, suits Boer tactics, and the very shape of the frontiers, which already north of the Tugela seemed to yield and contract under growing pressure from either flank, plainly invited those enveloping movements which are the beginning and end of Boer strategy. Indeed, had the allies neglected all their other frontiers and thrown their whole strength into Natal, they might still have overrun the colony, and exchanged shots at Durban with the fleet itself. The siege of Mafeking was the first and the greatest mistake made by the Boers in the war.

The colonists of Northern Natal, as was natural for men who lived over the embers of the last war, were the first to realise their danger, and as early as May, 1899, the mining interests of Dundee and Newcastle represented to the Natal Ministry their defenceless condition. But the strategic conditions of Northern Natal were then imperfectly understood by the British Government. Any invasion of Natal, replied Sir Alfred Milner to the Natal Ministry, when he learned the fears of the colonists, would of course be resisted by the whole forces of the Empire, and Mr. Chamberlain telegraphed

approval of his reply. To the Colonial Office it was only a patriotic truism, but it was very much more to Natal. It was in fact construed as a pledge that no portion of Natal should be abandoned for lack of preparation or for the general purposes of the campaign. But as the danger of war grew more real, it was seen that the pledge—if pledge it was in intention—could not possibly be redeemed. A whole army corps would scarcely have sufficed to bar all those doors into Natal, each liable to spring open at any moment and admit an enemy to the defender's flank or rear. Concentration of our military strength in Natal and a policy of vigorous offence might have solved the problem of defence, and satisfied the pledge; but it had been decided for very good military reasons that the offensive operations should be directed not from Natal but from Cape Colony. And so what seemed a political truism in May was military folly in October. The practical question was not whether all Natal should be defended in the event of war, but how much should be abandoned.

Not without some complaints from the colonists Charlestown and Newcastle were abandoned, and our most northern military station was fixed at

Dundee, forty-six miles north of Ladysmith, and sixty miles south of Laing's Nek. The defence of Dundee was a concession to the mining interest, but Sir George White had doubts of its propriety from the moment of his arrival in Natal. Dundee might have served as an advance post against invasion from the Transvaal alone; but when it became certain that the Free State would fight, and that Ladysmith would be threatened not only from the north, but from the Drakensberg Passes on the west as well, its retention offended against his military instinct. On the evening of October 10th, the day on which the Ultimatum was received, he approached the Governor, and forcibly urged the withdrawal of the garrison. Unfortunately the Natal Ministry was too deeply committed to let Dundee go the way of Newcastle and Charlestown. Political reasons were urged against the abandonment; and Sir George White yielded against his better judgment. Thirty-six hours later the Boers invaded Natal.

There was one chance of success, and only one. Sir George White saw that the difficulties of transport through the mountain passes would

prevent the Boers from entering Natal in a single column; and that if they wished to make full use of the strategic advantages of their positions, they would have to invade in at least three columns—a column through the Drakensberg Passes on the west, another from the north, and perhaps a third from the Buffalo Drifts on the east. His single chance lay in taking these columns in detail. If he could force the Free State Boers to an engagement, and defeat them, he might hope to draw some of the Transvaal Boers from Natal into the Free State, or if they left their allies in the lurch, and persisted in the invasion, he could leave a small garrison at Ladysmith and hurry the main body of his army up to Dundee and the Biggarsberg. But if these, as one may suppose, were the hopes that induced him to consent to the retention of Dundee, a very few days must have convinced him that they were not destined to be fulfilled. The Free State Boers remained in the shelter of the difficult country at the foot of the Drakensberg Passes, obstinately declining an engagement, yet never ceasing to menace Ladysmith. It soon became obvious that the Boers were aware of the fault in

our dispositions, and were no less anxious than Sir George White to take the opposing forces in detail. There were at this time nine thousand men at Ladysmith, and four thousand, under General Symons, were encamped along the short branch line between Glencoe and Dundee. The isolation of General Symons became the first object of the invasion.

The Transvaal Boers entered Natal in three columns. The main column under General Joubert crossed Laing's Nek and occupied Charlestown, and, a day or two later, Newcastle. Another column under Viljoen entered by Botha's Pass, moved south through the Biggarsberg, and cut the railway between Glencoe and Ladysmith. At the same time a column from Wakkerstroom crossed the Buffalo River, which forms the frontier of Natal to the east, and advanced upon Dundee. The plan was to attack Dundee simultaneously from the north and the east, while the Free State Boers held Sir George White at Ladysmith, and Viljoen's force prevented the retreat of the garrison south, or the arrival of any small reinforcements that could be spared from Ladysmith.

Fortunately, the movements were badly timed. Lukas Meyer seized Talana Hill before dawn on Friday, October 20th. Viljoen had already succeeded in cutting the railway at Elands-laagte in the afternoon of Thursday, but the main body under Joubert did not reach Dundee until Saturday. This was the first of the two blunders that saved the garrison.

General Symons's pickets had been falling back for some days along the road from Newcastle before the main Boer army advancing from the north, and Viljoen's force had given notice of its approach by driving in an outpost at Glencoe on its way southwards to Elands-laagte. But the first warning of danger from the east was not given until early in the morning on the day of the attack, when a Mounted Infantry picket near one of the Buffalo Drifts was fired upon and forced to retire. At five o'clock all General Symons's men were under arms, and a few minutes later the Boer artillery opened fired from Talana Hill, east of the town, at a range of three thousand yards. An artillery duel followed, and just before nine General Symons gave the order for an attack on the hill. There was not a moment to lose, for General

Symons did not know how soon the more formidable attack from the north might be delivered. Leaving the Leicestershire Regiment to guard the camp, he moved out against the hill with his other battalions, the King's Rifles, the Dublin Fusiliers, and the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Talana is a hill eight hundred feet high, situated on the north side of a nek which the east road crosses before it dips down to the Buffalo River. It is a typical South African hill, with a broad, flat top, and a precipitous ascent up the last few hundred feet. Round the base of the steep slope runs a stone wall, and the lower and gentler slopes are clothed with a wood. The wood was easily gained by the advancing troops, but for a long time the exposed belt between the wood and the stone wall was impassable; here it was that the gallant Symons, who had advanced with his reserves into the firing line, fell mortally wounded.

At the wall another long halt occurred, but by half-past eleven our artillery had silenced the enemy's guns and was able to move forward to within a range of a mile. The fire from the top of the hill now slackened, and the infantry rushed forward, scaling the precipitous slopes on hands

and knees. Talana Hill was won. It was a great achievement, but it was sadly marred by the loss of Symons and by the events of the afternoon. When the artillery reached the nek, the Boers were flying round the far side of the hill in parties of fifty and a hundred within easy range, but the fugitives escaped under a white flag. Later in the day Colonel Möller, who early in the morning had moved round the hill with the 18th Hussars in order to intercept the retreat, came into contact with the main Boer force to the north, and was forced to surrender with two hundred men. Our losses were forty-five killed and 184 wounded, besides the prisoners; and though Lukas Meyer's column was completely broken up, the fate of Colonel Möller and the Hussars warned General Yule, who had succeeded General Symons, that a more formidable attack might begin at any moment.

Sir George White learned on Thursday night that Viljoen's column had cut the line between Ladysmith and Dundee, and a reconnaissance by General French on Friday discovered the enemy's position near the Elandslaagte collieries. A second reconnaissance, the next morning, showed that the

enemy was in greater strength than had been expected, and reinforcements were hastily sent up the line. The Boers occupied a strong position on a ridge which lies at right angles with the railway line, and about two thousand yards distant from it. Sir George White came up with the reinforcements, but he generously yielded the direction of the operations to General French.

It was decided to make a combined frontal and flank attack on the Boer position. The frontal attack was assigned to the Devonshire Regiment, which was skilfully led by Major Park across the plain to the foot of the ridge held by the Boers, where it lay in extended formation, taking cover behind ant-hills. Meanwhile the Manchesters and the Gordons, supported by the Imperial Light Horse, were marching along a rocky spur of the main ridge to turn the enemy's left. At the beginning of the march they found good cover behind the boulders, but about three-quarters of a mile from the enemy's camp they came to a patch of ground two hundred yards wide, destitute of cover and dusted with bullets. Across this they ran, bending under the storm, to the cover of a shoulder of the hill, up the shoulder, and on to the plateau

beyond, down again into a fold of the hill, and then up the final ascent. The Devons now took up the attack from the front, and the enemy's position was carried at the point of the bayonet. And so was won the most complete British victory of this war before the relief of Kimberley. Out of a force barely exceeding 1,000 men the Boers lost 100 killed, 108 wounded, and 188 prisoners, including Commandants Schiel and Kock; and their camp, with all its equipment and two guns, was captured. Our losses were fifty-five killed and 207 wounded.

The troops bivouacked on the field under pouring rain. The same night found General Yule's men also away from their camp, bivouacking on the open hill-side. Joubert's long-range guns had opened fire from Mount Impati on our troops at Dundee in the afternoon, just when the Highland and Manchester regiments were reaching the summit of the Elandslaagte hills, and the victors of Talana had been forced to abandon their camp and to move out of range. The blunder of occupying Dundee had been expiated, but not vindicated. Relief from Ladysmith was impossible with the Free State forces still un-

defeated, and for General Yule to hold Dundee without reinforcements was equally impossible. There was no alternative but retreat, and retreat in the face of an enemy superior in numbers is one of the most difficult of all military operations.

There are two roads from Dundee to Ladysmith. The shorter runs west to Glencoe Junction, and then turns south through a gap on the Biggarsberg, crossing and recrossing the railway line until Ladysmith is reached. The other road runs south-east in the direction of Helpmakaar, and turns abruptly west at Beith. The first road was blocked by the enemy at Glencoe Pass, but by a strange oversight the second had been left unguarded. This was the second blunder that saved the garrison at Dundee. At nine o'clock on Sunday night, General Yule's column started on its perilous retreat, and at dawn the next day it had travelled eight miles. The rains had converted the whole countryside into a quagmire; but General Yule pushed on. A march in the afternoon brought the column to the cross-roads at Beith. The march had not yet been molested, but Waschbank Pass, the most critical part of the journey, lay ahead. Prudence counselled another

night march, and on Tuesday morning—only five days after the brilliant engagement at Dundee—the troops encamped in open country near Waschbank Spruit, now swollen to a torrent.

No attempt had yet been made by the Transvaal Boers to follow up the retreat; but on Tuesday the Free State Boers threatened to cross the main road between Glencoe and Ladysmith, and assail the flank of the retreating column. Sir George White accordingly moved out from Ladysmith and fought a flank action at Rietfontein, on the northern slopes of Intintanyone, to cover the retreat. His object was attained, and two days later General Yule's troops entered Ladysmith by the road over Lombard's Nek, travel-stained and dog-tired, but still unbeaten by the enemy.

The army of Natal had fought three successful actions merely to secure the concentration for which Sir George White had pleaded before the war began. Its victories had been barren. It is true that no retreat from Dundee would have been possible but for the victory of Elands-laagte, and had General Symons—left alas! at Dundee to die in the enemy's hands—delayed a few hours to

make the attack on Talana Hill, there would have been no garrison of Dundee to retreat. But these results were not the genuine ripe fruits of victory, for they might have been gathered without cost before the war began. Nor if we attach importance to the good moral effects of victory, however barren it may be of material results, can we deny the bad moral effects of a retreat, however skilfully conducted. General Yule's retreat was a miracle of good luck and good management, and its merits have not been esteemed as they deserve. But its effect was none the less to depress spirits, and not all Joubert's courtesy could quite reconcile the troops to the hard necessity of abandoning their wounded. The explanation of our strategic defeat most affected at the time in England was that the Boer operations were the conception of a military genius, and many guesses were made at his name. But that theory will not bear examination. The general plan was good, but its execution was marred by several blunders. Two detachments had been exposed to defeat in detail, and the garrison of Dundee had, after all, been allowed to escape. Not until the battles of Nicholson's Nek and Farquhar's Farm did the Boer leaders

display really high qualities of generalship in the field. But the Boer blunders, great as they were, availed us nothing after our cardinal blunder in attempting to hold Dundee.

Sir George White had now concentrated his forces at Ladysmith. Unfortunately, his position was by no means so favourable as it would have been had the concentration been effected before the war broke out. A fortnight had been lost, and time is never so valuable as at the beginning of a campaign; the necessity of watching Dundee had prevented him from giving his undivided attention to the Free State Boers on his left flank; the railway line had been kept free for the retreat of the Dundee garrison until it was too late to destroy it, and the Boers were now advancing rapidly along it. In war it is never possible wholly to repair the ill effects of faulty dispositions. Sir George White had barely time to unite his forces before the Boers were upon him. General Yule's wearied troops were still resting after their arduous march when Sir George White made his first reconnaissance of the main Boer army under Joubert. Closer acquaintance, moreover, with the country round Ladysmith must have filled him with

serious misgivings for the future. The strategic position of the town was not unimportant, for it was the junction of the railways from the Free State and the Transvaal. But it was not a good military centre for the defence of Natal, and a worse place to defend against attack could hardly have been found. Surrounded on all sides by tiers of hills, an outer tier much too wide to defend, and an inner tier still too extensive for defence by a comparatively small army, and commanded by the outer tier, Ladysmith invited a siege, and was ill-adapted to sustain it. Sir George White must often have looked anxiously at Bulwana and Lombard's Kop. When once the Boers had obtained possession of that outer circle of hills and mounted their guns of position upon it, a field force in Ladysmith, equipped with ordinary field artillery, would be virtually caught in a trap ; and but for Sir George White's prescience in sending for naval guns nothing could have saved Ladysmith. The outer circle of hills not only increased the difficulties of defending the town against a siege, but also made an admirable screen for the movements of the enemy ; and already the Free State Boers had begun cautiously to work

round his left in the direction of Colenso. He badly missed the protection of some natural barrier, such as a river or a chain of mountains; and, indeed, had he been free to select his position he might perhaps have retired behind the Tugela. But he was never free. Stores had been accumulated in the town; so long as there was a garrison at Dundee, retreat south of the Tugela had been out of the question, and when the concentration had been effected it was too late to think of withdrawal. And when he remembered how the people of Natal believed that we had promised to defend all their frontiers, how disappointed they had been when Charlestown and Newcastle were abandoned, and how they had held out for the protection of Dundee, how could he entertain the idea of a hurried retreat from Ladysmith just after Dundee had been sacrificed? Sir George White, then, was irrevocably committed to the defence of Ladysmith.

To act strictly on the defensive was to be surrounded; and it was impossible for the general of a victorious army to submit to that without a struggle. Sir George White had already, when he sent for the naval guns, fore-

seen the possibility of a siege. But his army was still the field army for the defence of Natal, not the garrison of Ladysmith; and only by a policy of vigorous offensive could he preserve the freedom of movement that was so necessary if Natal south of the Tugela were to be protected from invasion. He decided, therefore, to strike before the enemy could close round him.

The Boers had already occupied the outer edge of the Intintanyone plateau to the north of Ladysmith, and were creeping round Lombard's Kop and Bulwana on the east. This encircling movement Sir George White saw must be checked, or the naval guns which he had sent for would never reach him.

On the evening of October 29th Sir George White made his dispositions for attack. Five battalions of infantry under Colonel Grimwood, three regiments of cavalry under General French, and four batteries of field artillery, were to dislodge the Boers from Lombard's Kop. A second column under Colonel Hamilton, consisting of four battalions of infantry, two regiments of cavalry, and four batteries of artillery, was to march due north to the enemy's position

on Intintanyone, holding the Boers in check, but not attacking unless the development of events elsewhere afforded a suitable opportunity. Obviously, it was vital to the success of these operations that the left flank should be made quite secure. Accordingly Colonel Carleton, with four and a half companies of the Gloucestershire Regiment, six companies of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, and a Mountain Battery, was directed to march north along Bell's Spruit and to seize Nicholson's Nek—a gap in the hills north of Ladysmith which, if left unprotected, would have afforded the enemy a ready passage round to the west of Ladysmith. The object of this movement was not to turn the enemy's position, but to prevent the enemy from turning ours. All three columns left Ladysmith in the early hours of October 30th.

Colonel Grimwood's column reached Lombard's Kop at dawn and found it evacuated. The abandonment of the Kop in the night by the Boers showed that they had had full information of our intended movements, and that their plan was to entice the column out in the hope of separating it from the centre. Even if they were

not successful in that, the plan carried with it the advantage of drawing General White's attention away from Colonel Carleton's small column on the left, against which the Boers had already laid their plans. But these inferences, so obvious now, were by no means so obvious then. Finding Lombard's Kop evacuated Colonel Grimwood's column followed the Boers for six miles before a furious flank attack directed against the left of his column revealed their stratagem. Fortunately Sir George White, who was with the centre, realised the danger in time. He ordered Colonel Grimwood to retire, and despatched three out of the four regiments of infantry forming the centre to cover his retreat. The Boer attempt to pierce between the two wings was happily defeated, but our troops suffered severely, chiefly from the fire of the enemy's guns of position. There was a critical period in the retirement; but just when things were at their worst the Boer long range guns met with their match. The naval guns had arrived in Ladysmith that morning and were already in action. The two wings were back again in Ladysmith by two o'clock in the after-

noon. Sir George White had failed to prevent the occupation of Lombard's Kop, and the occupation of the whole outer circle of hills by the enemy was now only a matter of time.

But what in the meantime had become of the Gloucestershires and the Royal Irish Fusiliers under Colonel Carleton? Earlier in the day there had been rumours of disaster. The mules of the Mountain Battery, it was said, had stampeded, and the column had lost all its ammunition. Two men of the Gloucestershire Regiment actually brought the story to our centre while it was lying at the foot of Intintanyone, waiting for the right wing to develop its attack. Either the story was not believed or it was assumed that Colonel Carleton would at once abandon his mission after the loss of his ammunition. But when the centre and right reached Ladysmith after the failure of our movement on Lombard's Kop, it was found that Colonel Carleton's column was still out. Anxiety deepened as the afternoon wore on and the column did not return; and when night fell it was certain that we had suffered a great disaster. At half-past eleven Sir George White sat down in despair and wrote the noble

despatch in which he announced the disaster and took upon himself the whole blame for what had happened. Next morning General Joubert sent a messenger into Ladysmith under a flag of truce granting us permission to bury the dead and remove the wounded. Not until then was the full story of the disaster known in Ladysmith—how the mules had been stampeded by firing in the night, how the column had seized and entrenched a kopje two miles from the Nek only to find next morning that it was commanded on all sides by the Boers, and how the men had continued to fight until all the ammunition in their pouches was exhausted and there was no alternative but surrender. Our total losses on October 30th, in killed, wounded and missing, were over eleven hundred officers and men.

Two days later the investment of Ladysmith was complete. The relief of Ladysmith became the chief military interest of the war, the dearest wish of English-speaking people all over the world. How, after many failures, it was finally accomplished, is told in the pages that follow.

H. S.

CHAPTER I

BOUND FOR THE SEAT OF WAR

R.M.S. *DUNOTTAR CASTLE*,
CAPE TOWN, *Tuesday, October 31st, 1899.*

THE brains of the army were being packed into the trains on that morning of departure at Waterloo Station. That was why there was a crowd so great, so clamorous, and so attentive ; and now that I know something more about the brains of the army I see that the people who thronged the platforms had drawn justification out of that strange bag of principles which govern the actions of a multitude. It was a valuable freight which sped down to Southampton, and ever since has been folded within these tiny walls and swung and tumbled across the ocean. To think of all the brains in one box, and that dwindled into a speck and lost for all these days ! The box is unprotected too, and I, for one, can

scarcely sight a strange sail without half wondering if the Boers have not somehow contrived to have just one small ship in waiting to capture the brains of the army. But the achievements of modern warfare still drag lamely behind romantic fiction ; we are safe, the Boers are dull, science is slow, and the British Intelligence Division may still boast at least some reputation. Of the quality of this brilliant staff which is to be the brains of the British army operating in South Africa more falls to be said in its appropriate place.

War wears a double face. One face is a mask which has been thrust upon it, and this face is all laughter ; the other is the natural face of war, and it is all tears. The two are not seen as alternatives, but always side by side. At Waterloo Station there it was—the eternal double face of war. Beside a bawling, singing, hatless, perspiring, triumphant face, a face straining, clinched, stricken, speechless—a face of unfathomed woe. As the train moved out of the station the long frieze of faces was drawn past one's carriage, the higher faces crushed into the architrave formed by the top of the carriage window. The first few faces were distinct—sad and glad ; but the platform was

incredibly long, the train quickened, and we said goodbye to a composite picture. At Southampton, again the double face of war. It filled the wharves as, the oldest captain said, they had never been filled before, and, surging, it craned itself up to the vessel's decks; in the one character it urged us on, in the other it beckoned us back. You turned to the seaward side, and there was a placid face that was only inscrutable. Southampton Water might have been a lake that reached to you from the foot of the grounds below the white, castled house; the small boats crept softly along under the bushes; the whole thing was elegant and artificial and unruffled.

At last we were off, and then a cry of farewell crackled below the ship and spread; along the lines it went—such a shout as the oldest captain had never heard at Southampton before. And then we on the *Dunottar Castle* glided away till the screen of faces was watered down into the vague solidity of the quay walls. One excursion steamer ran alongside us for a few moments; her passengers swarmed at her side to snatch a last glimpse of Sir Redvers Buller and his staff; the water streamed through the open work of her

paddle-box on that side, the other paddle flapped at the water, and the vessel, like a wounded duck, fell speedily into our wake. A little later came darkness, the red light of the Needles, and then the growing roll of the Channel. Thus the brains of the army started for South Africa.

On the monotony—or what we choose to think the monotony—of a modern voyage it were useless to dwell. Really a sea voyage is almost the only means left by which we may easily and suddenly escape from end-of-the-century life; it is a time to be prized and cherished and used in a new and wholly peculiar way; it is a secret door for our convenience and our profit. Yet most of us inexcusably neglect to appreciate it; our intolerance of the days spent at sea becomes continually greater as science makes a modern voyage continually shorter. We reckon time by our meals—it is so long after breakfast or before dinner—and the daily miracles of the changing latitudes are performed in vain. The tropical night, not heralded by twilight, shuts down on us suddenly, and ten minutes after daylight the foam at the vessel's side, now illuminated by the electric lights of the ship, is darting in snow-white

patches right and left on to an inky field ; the dense clouds of the trade winds, heavily banked on the horizon, are at night the most tremendous and frowning battlement of the world ; the Southern Cross holds a strategic position in the sky, and is the private property of the Southern peoples.

But these things are hardly good enough to save us from our preoccupying sense of monotony. What has the ship herself done for us ? The passengers are a characteristic ship's company bound for the wars. You may suppose that the operations of a British army are too regular to admit the casual and irregular adventurer. You may be right, but the casual adventurer disagrees with you. There are at least ten passengers on board this ship who mean to find adventure, and almost certainly will find it, but at the moment they have not the least notion how.

Where the fighting is, there are the English gathered together. I remember how it struck me when I was waiting in Thessaly for the Greek war to begin. Every night I dined in a café where all round me was the unintelligible chatter of an aviary. Suddenly the war began ; four nights

later I dined again in the café, and at dinner I became conscious that the buzz of the café was somehow changed. English, I found on observation, was being spoken on my right, also on my left, and indeed, when I came to notice it, behind me, and—yes—in every part of the room. The teeth of war had been sown and the harvest of armed Englishmen had risen from the ground.

There are among us names well known in the modern history of South Africa. There is, for instance, the family of Mr. Woolls-Sampson, most implacable enemy of the Boers, renowned for having fought that duel with rifles in which he received four bullet wounds, and his enemy, the Boer, five. The Boer still carries five bullets in his body. Later Mr. Sampson was imprisoned as one of the Reform Committee. Unlike most of the others, he refused to petition for his release, and at last, after thirteen months, was released on the occasion of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Now he is major of the Imperial Light Horse.

A mutograph—that is the name hit upon for the instrument which takes the continuous photographs for the biograph—is a familiar figure of the decks; a huge square box of a camera, on an iron tripod,

which is found on examination to be full of burring electrical works. It looks as though it would require a team of artillery horses to bring it into action on the field, and its crew of three men have more than once been unable to train it in time on a ship that grew rapidly up from the horizon. But it will be limbered and unlimbered rapidly enough, no doubt, when the time comes, for to-day we could scarcely go to war without it. On some afternoons it has been placed so as to command the hurricane deck, where the General, his staff, and the rest of us promenade before dinner. "You can catch me if you can," says the General, "but I won't pose for you." Perhaps he was caught, perhaps he was not, but if caught it was with a shoal of small fry.

All day the staff officers study technical writings, examine maps, and lay their heads together, and on to such solemn confabulations perhaps drift the strains of the intermezzo from "Cavalleria Rusticana" performed, with one finger, in the music saloon. A quoit thrown at a bucket strikes and incenses an eminent cartographer whose head is bowed in meditation. Such ridiculous contrasts are inevitable on a passenger ship which carries the brains of the army.

The doctors have been quite busy. They have lectured to us on the efficacy and advisability of inoculation against enteric fever, pointing out that the statistics gathered during the epidemic at Maidstone were overwhelmingly convincing. And at the end of each lecture some of us have ranged ourselves in a line, and as we passed the arch-doctor sitting before his little witches' cauldron each of us was stabbed in the side with the hypodermic syringe dipped in the typhoid serum. One inoculation protects you from typhoid; two inoculations, we are told, secure you against it for at least two years. My own symptoms after receiving the minute wound were the symptoms of others—first an Elysian lassitude, and then headache and fever for perhaps twenty-four hours. After that nothing remained but stiffness in the side, and that too was gone in three days.

From the monotony of the passage two incidents stand out and wear a certain distinction. On Monday, October 23rd, we overtook an Aberdeen White Star vessel, the *Nineveh*, south of the equator. The *Dunottar Castle* altered her course so that we passed the hired transport near enough to throw a biscuit on board. The New South

Wales Lancers, clay-coloured, thronged her decks and her rigging, and our own clay-coloured troops stood solid on the fo'c'sle head. While the *Dunottar Castle* straddled the seas the smaller ship dived and reared buoyantly with the slow rhythm of the ocean on the northern fringe of the "Trades"; now her sharp fiddle-bows divided the water till that dusky white immutable figure-head with the folded arms stooped to the water; now the water fell away from her green sides till the red bilges showed like the sides of a gold-fish.

"Is Sir Redvers Buller on board?" the *Nineveh* signalled.

The rising yelp of her siren was answered by the steady, profound blast of our fog-horn. Major Rhodes—"one of the brothers," as one hears him called—the chief signaller of the staff, ran to the fo'c'sle head and signalled somehow with a handkerchief. The mutograph was desperately trained on the *Nineveh*, but too late. "What won the Cesarewitch?" was the last question which reached us, and then the *Nineveh*, still fluttering with handkerchiefs and ringing with cheers, fell back into our wake and the distance.

On Sunday, October 29th, the *Australasian*,

also of the Aberdeen White Star Line, came in sight. It is strange how different associations breed different practices. Men and women who would not stop in Regent Street if a hansom fell in pieces before them, will spend hours watching a speck on the horizon when they are in mid-ocean; will stream up from the saloons and the cabins to see a poor mean little brig shuffling and drifting through the doldrums. But the meeting with the *Australasian* was more important than that; it was the most dramatic encounter at sea that any of us could call to mind, or was likely to experience again. When we sighted her she quickly came near to us. She was coming from the Cape, not going to it, and since she was coming from the Cape, why she must have news—news only three days old.

Think of the days we had fed only on speculation; think what it was to be without news of the war for two weeks; remember that we had the brains of the army on board, and then realise the curious mixture of voracity, impatience, excitement, and emotion with which we altered our course to come quite near the approaching vessel, burst out our signals from the mast, tumbled down

the companions to our cabins for glasses and cameras, returned, and—waited.

I, for one, will always believe that the *Australasian* slackened almost to dead slow as she approached us; but there is the captain's evidence to the contrary, that she never altered her speed. At all events we came side to side with her at last, and then some one discovered that she had a long black board hung on her ratlines, and on the board there was—was it?—yes, not a doubt of it—writing.

Would the letters never stop flickering in the end of one's glasses? The ship would be by in a moment, and why on earth hadn't she come nearer? But at last the words drew out and separated themselves from the continuous line of chalk. We read—

"Truce." Yes, "Truce." What, already?

No—"Three"; that was it—"Three."

"Three battles," so we read, catching the last words as the *Australasian* slipped past us—"Three battles; the Boers defeated: Symons killed."

In a few minutes the *Australasian* was hull down in the distance, but her quick transit had made an incredible difference to us; we looked on the sea with enlightened eyes.

CHAPTER II

ON TO THE FRONT

PIETERMARITZBURG, *Tuesday, November 7th, 1899.*

THE *Dunottar Castle*, with Sir Redvers Buller on board, had been expected in Table Bay all Monday, October 30th, and a military party of welcome stood on the quay to receive him. A fog lay on the sea and rain poured on the troops, but they stood and soaked, and changed from one leg to the other, patiently impatient. At last news came from the signalling station outside the bay that two vessels were approaching ; the party of welcome brisked up and peered into the obscurity. Then came the first vessel, and when she thrust her shoulders through the fog and was seen to be the *Zibenghla*, with artillery on board—well, she deserved a welcome, but she scarcely was given one for very disappointment.

And when the second vessel turned out to be a tramp, and darkness fell on her arrival, the troops packed away home to angle for better luck the next day. All this I heard afterwards.

The *Dunottar Castle* arrived about ten o'clock on the Monday night, too late to go alongside the quay. I doubt whether she was recognised at first, for we seemed to wait an unconscionable time before the tender came out to take off the mails. Impatience grew into indignation, but do not suppose that we were altruists who wished other people to get their letters quickly. What we wanted was news.

At last a man came on board with a newspaper, and we hustled and menaced him as though he had been a dangerous criminal ; soon the paper was snatched from him, and the new owner was pursued and brought to bay half-way up a ladder. There he stood under an electric lamp and read us extracts. The audience swelled, and the reader was driven to a new point ; he read us extracts in the smoking-room, more under a lamp by the wheel-house, more half-way down the saloon companion, and at last he gave a grand recital in the music saloon. In the audience there were men,

as I know, who heard the names of their brothers, uncles, and cousins in the list of casualties. "And so Woolls-Sampson was wounded;" and for a time there must be a pause to that dramatic hostility of his carried on against the Boers in battle, politics, and prison. Other names in the list of casualties to the Imperial Light Horse I recognised, and began to see that this body contained many athletes—cricketers, football players, well-known sportsmen—and was, in fact, rather like the American Rough Riders. Farren, for example—I felt sure he was the Farren who used to row for the London Rowing Club. The correspondent told of nothing but gallantry and success at Ladysmith, but soldiers and those who had had any experience of soldiering read between the lines, and asked themselves why this daily fighting in that northern wedge of Natal and this daily return to camp in the same place. Why did not Sir George White sit still where he was rather than provoke fighting in those hills which gave all the advantage to the enemy—unless, indeed, it was that the enemy forced him to fight by threatening to come round his flank and cut him off? It seemed to us that that was the explana-

tion, but then to think that the Boers should be so strong and so skilful! We went to bed knowing already that the Boers had been undervalued, that the fighting was far more serious than any one had foreseen, and that we were face to face with a bloody and perhaps a long war.

The next morning the General landed, and I should pay the greatest compliment to the character of his reception by not describing it. Why should it be a carnival? It was the necessary greeting, with little pomp, of a necessary person come on a stern mission, and so the bunting did not look like the bunting of a carnival, and the cheers were the cheers of hospitality rather than of merriment.

I followed the procession in a hansom, which was typical of Cape Town hansoms, and which made an indelible mark on my memory. Every Cape Town hansom has a name; mine was called the Diggers' Camp. It looked like a London hansom which had received a violent blow on the top, so that in the process of being flattened out it had become squatter and longer. The Diggers' Camp seemed to be specially adapted to collect the rain by pouring it off the window

into the inside of the cab ; and the general condition of Cape Town hansoms is such that Mr. E. T. Reed should not miss them in prosecuting his studies in the prehistoric. From the small to the great one might go at a leap, and say how disappointing the whole of Cape Town is compared with Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, and other colonial capitals. The Mount Nelson Hotel, however, is a particular star. I have seen hotels on which far more money has been spent ; I have never seen one on which money had been spent to such good purpose. The collection of old prints, the Chippendale chairs, the Persian rugs, were all surprising and admirable. The General and his staff stayed there ; and then one was glad to see so many prominent Outlanders comfortable there too. Some one, remembering Sir Alfred Milner's famous despatch, has called the place "The Helots' Rest." Cape Town has accepted the name.

At the offices of the Castle Line some of us found that it was possible to reach Natal sooner—and Natal meant the fighting—by leaving the *Dunottar Castle*, travelling by train to East London, and thence by a small mail packet to Durban. Plans are liable to frustration of every

sort in these disjointed times, but if the plan succeeded we should reach Durban at least four days ahead of the *Dunottar Castle*. It was worth trying, and three of us decided to make the attempt.

How much there was to be done before nine o'clock that night! For one thing, my luggage was nearly all stored in the hold of the ship, labelled for Natal. The manner in which I cajoled the baggage officer into turning over some hundreds of tons of luggage and extracting mine from the bottom, and all this when he had been turning this same luggage over and over all day long and had only just packed it away, as he thought for the last time, would appear less persuasive in the description than it was in fact. I hope I thanked that baggage officer of the *Dunottar Castle* duly at the time, but I make him my compliments again.

The passengers got wind of our plan when it was too late for any one else to join in it. The first tendency of the adventurers and the correspondents, who were all counting the minutes till they would be in Natal, was towards destructive criticism; but when an old colonist, after much

sorrowful meditation, admitted the soundness of the plan, their faces grew longer, and I thought one of them looked suddenly ten years older.

We started at nine that night, and our train turned out to be the last to get through from Cape Town to East London. The great thing in our favour was that the train carried the mails, and when British people wait for their news from home nothing is more certain than that every effort will be made to see that they get it. The first law of the correspondent's life is to get there, and the second is to get there, and the third is also to get there ; and in fulfilling the law the best rule of all is to stick to the mails. Usually the mails from Great Britain to Durban, after being landed at Cape Town, are taken all the rest of the way by train *via* Johannesburg. That was now impossible, but we had had the good fortune to stumble on the new and unadvertised plan for taking them on by sea from East London to Durban.

My companions were Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill, the correspondent of the *Morning Post*, who lately stood as Parliamentary candidate for Oldham, and Captain the Hon. A. Campbell, the correspondent of Laffan's Agency. On the

train we found a young engineer who was on his way to become overseer of a certain section of the Cape railways. He was one of the staff of the desert railway in Lord Kitchener's campaign ; and now he had come, like all the rest of the staff, to develop the New Idea of warfare by railway. From Girouard downwards—Girouard who has left his prosperous life in Cairo—they have all come, and when Girouard moves he is followed by many intelligent disciples.

Even in the southerly districts of Cape Colony we were reminded of the war ; at every bridge, at every little culvert, all the way from Cape Town to East London, a man stood with two flags, a white and a red, in his hands, and if the piece of railway which he guarded had not been tampered with he waved us on with the white flag.

It is a striking journey through the great tablelands of Cape Colony ; the aspect of the country is a singular mixture of gloom and beauty. You can lift up your eyes to the dim hills, and they are massive and grand even when they are not purple in the sun ; but near at hand the kopjes and the great flat sandy karroo have a strain of deformity in their nature. The dreary faded green of wattle and

gum-tree on Australian downs has a mournful beauty that grows on you and masters the sense of monotony ; the unbroken flatness of the English fens with the oppressive sky thrust close down on the horizon like a vaulted roof all round you also becomes beautiful to you ; but these things require time to take possession of your mind. The karroo and the kopjes seize your imagination by the throat at once and compel your mind, but compel it with the power of something mysterious, gargoylish.

The karroo of these great lands lies half-way between a knotted and frozen lunar landscape and healthy English country ; it is something that has been formed in the twilight of creation. The kopjes are nearly all flat-topped, as though each hill, half or three-quarters of the way up, had been slashed through with a scimitar. Cape Town does not boast its Table Mountain merely because it is flat-topped, but rather because it is an imposing specimen of a common type. Scarcely anywhere in Cape Colony can you throw your eyes round without seeing a massive table, as flat and regular as though it had been ruled with a spirit-level, standing buttressed up under heaven. Thousands of these have a natural claim to be thought an

Olympus ; and perhaps—who knows?—in the mythology of the primitive natives a party of deities threw their dice on every mountain table in Epicurean callousness. Meanwhile the neglected land below produced its flowers without scent and its birds without song. And yet these lands are near the skies and are full of keen and blowing airs that string up your nerves. A sheep here requires six hundred acres of country all to itself ; but that modest estate granted it thrives, whether it be lean or fat tailed.

Our most faithful companions across the karroo were the “devils” of dust. A handful of sand suddenly leaps up in the air on the back of a breeze and, beginning to whirl round, seems to call on the sands to join it. And so they do catching at its trailing skirts and making the revolving funnel (already a pillar in height) rise further and further into the air. So the little sandy hurricane, both revolving and marching, goes swaying forward across the karroo ; in the distance, before or behind, one could generally see a “devil” competing rather hopelessly with the train.

The second night in the train we arrived at

De Aar, at midnight. Mr. E. F. Knight came on board to see us, and told us that an attack on De Aar might be made at any moment. Then we began to doubt whether our train would not be cut off by the Boers a little further along the line. For many miles the line runs parallel with the southern frontier of the Orange Free State, and not only was this part of the country unprotected, but the Cape Dutch who live along the line were thought likely to help the Boers at once. Stories of brewing disaffection assailed us everywhere; it needed only a little more encouragement—a few more misfortunes to the British troops—to precipitate it. But the night passed, and so did the train. The worst that happened, as we heard later, was that a northward branch of the line was cut some miles away from us.

At noon the next day we reached Stormberg Junction, and the little station was full of business. A train stood in a siding laden with men from the *Powerful*. Our train was now delayed, and we spent two hours at the station. Meanwhile the Naval Brigade went off like men sitting in boats, with trucks for the boats, nursing their guns and

smiling. They did not know where they were going—not they! They were simply told to get into the train, and they got in, and smiled, glad to be off after a month spent in one place; and then they lit their pipes and dropped their arms over the guns which were sitting down amongst them in the middle of the trucks, and smiled again under the hats which were tied like bonnets under their chins. Such is the temper of the fighting machine.

Even we travellers soon knew that the garrison was to fall back on Queenstown—a long retreat, and retreat was not a thing to make one smile. Some artillery and mounted infantry marched off by route, and then only the 2nd Berkshires were left to go later. A young officer with a ragged beard and a glowing furnace of a face (here, indeed, in this exposed forward post, one saw the guise of war) showed us the cottage which he had fortified. It was loopholed and barricaded with sandbags, and was christened "Fort Chabrol." The only thing not provided against was shell fire, and the young officer had not time to dig beneath the foundations, "or we could have put up with that too," as he said. But now Fort

Chabrol had to be abandoned, and the designer and his labourers lingered about the place. Perhaps soon the Boers will be defending themselves in it, for it was left as it stood.

"If only I could burn it!" meditated the young officer; "but there's nothing to burn."

"Blowed if we couldn't blow it up," said one of the men.

But it was left, and a new engine which had been fixed to a well outside into the bargain.

Just one thing softened the shock of separation from the fort. I photographed it. The sentry outside presented arms, beaming; after all, its lineaments would be perpetuated; they would remain in some one's possession; some one would remember and understand; it was well.

Shortly afterwards we were in the train again and striking back into the heart of Cape Colony. At every cottage along the line for many miles we stopped to take away women and children. Once we stopped to put down a company of Durban volunteers who were to form an outpost to the new base—hearty, merry, strongly knitted, flexibly built men, clay-coloured in their khaki, with just one dash of colour where their hats were

slashed round with the red of the Leander Club, which every one knows at Henley Regatta. They disappeared to pitch their camp in a fold of the hills, and a cheer went after them. Thus we arrived in undue time, for we had been much delayed, at East London the next day.

To stick to the mails, let me say again, is a prescription that cures all the ills of travel. Once get yourself recognised as part of the mail, and officials will pack you and unpack you as readily as though you were labelled "News, Delagoa Bay," or "Letters, Durban." When we reached East London we were quite part of the mail; there we shook off all our fellow passengers, and the mail was taken down to the jetty in official-looking vans. Nothing but the mail—and you are to remember that we were part of it—travelled on the little packet to Durban, and now that I look back on the voyage I can understand why no one else grudged us the distinction. The packet was called the *Umsimvubu*, which is the original name of the St. John's river, and she was ninety tons register.

When it blows from the south or east on this part of the coast, there is a sea that seems to

well right up, unimpeded, from the south pole in the one case, or to gather its strength across the whole wide waste from Australia in the other. It was blowing a gale from the east on this day. Looking out through the narrow jaws of the river we could see large vessels pitching steadily at their anchorage in the bay, and a low-lying barque only occasionally showing us her bulwarks above the rollers. We started on a little strip of deliciously smooth water, and one dwelt appreciatively on every turn of the screw in this brief calm, for already at the mouth of the river we could see the rollers piled up in confusion. Four waves seemed to mark the transition from stillness to the tumult. At the first wave the little *Umzimvubu* tilted up her nose, and skipped across it with scarcely a quaver, but the next she took with a gasp and a heave, burying her nose in the third, which in its turn picked her high up and threw her forward on to the fourth; and the fourth accepted her with a shout, and cast her out into the bay on her side. After that, for a whole day and night, all the waves were like the fourth. You were not concerned in the simple calculation, whether or not you were a good

sailor ; it was rather a question whether you had a good enough head to sit on the shoulder of a spinning peg-top without reeling from giddiness.

To pitch is to pitch and to roll is to roll, but the *Umzimvubu* achieved the most curious mixture of sea-motions—some, I have no doubt, of her own inventing—that I could have imagined. She would climb slowly up one wave on her side, flop somehow over the top, and slide down the decline on her other side ; that was the simplest motion, and it was recurrent. She would also shoot down hill with a circular stabbing motion of her bows as though not quite certain where to strike in the trough of the seas, and her masts would pencil the most fantastic figures on the sky. When she did dive her nose into the sea, the water burst over the bows, and her bows, coming up with a jerk, seemed to throw it back on to the bridge as an elephant spirits water behind it ; and then the water sluiced along her deck, past the crew who stood knee-deep holding on to the rails, and burst in a fountain against the break of the poop, unless, indeed, before this motion was half over, the *Umzimvubu* received a slap under the counter, which drove her nose

further into the sea, and set her screw racing long and diabolically before she could recoil.

For twenty hours the deck was awash from end to end, and all the scuppers round the ship squirted like hose. The bridge stood up, an abrupt little island, but dripping like a half-tide rock. We passed the night—it would be untruthful to say slept—in a cabin common to the passengers and the crew almost directly over the screw, and in the morning I felt that I could travel by railway packed into a portmanteau without actually dying from being flung about. I have some impatience of the restraint with which sailors describe the weather; a night of anguish to the passenger means to them “a strong breeze,” and what the passenger imagines to be a West Indian hurricane they describe as “half a gale.” But the captain of the *Umsimvubu*—a charming Norwegian—was quite satisfying, and I can accept his evidence, as he did not leave the bridge for more than three minutes that whole night. He said it was the roughest night he had had for two years, “and,” he added, “if it hadn’t been for the mails I never should have come.” The mails! What will not people endure for that solemn trust, the British mails?

About the middle of the next day the captain said that the wind would change, and blow a gale from the west, and in two hours surely enough it did. Then we spread a square sail with stays running right aft to brace it in the simple manner with which the Viking and the Crusader must have been familiar, and, raising our speed of five knots to ten, thus sped before the pleasant gale. We arrived at Durban nearly four days before the *Dunottar Castle*, and one day before officers of the Natal Field Force who had been ordered off the *Dunottar Castle* at Cape Town and sent forward on the *Jelunga*. So our plan succeeded, and yet it failed—we were too late to get into Ladysmith. Again with the mails, but now somewhat chastened, we hurried to Maritzburg on the railway, which serpentines in astonishing curves over the rich hills, hills abounding with sleek cattle and noble views.

Here is an appropriate place, perhaps, to review the situation and confess the worst, for Maritzburg, lying in a cup made by the hills, is indeed open to the enemy. One writes with an oppressive sense of the disproofs that may be lying in wait for the prophet, but under a system of vigorous but neces-

sary censorship on telegrams a summary of what we feel here to-day may have its value when it comes to be read weeks hence, or at least it may be allowed then a sort of historical value. So far we have had to abandon every place which was menaced or attacked except one—Ladysmith—and in that place we are invested. At Pretoria, so far as I can understand, there are some 1,600 British prisoners, including about forty-five officers; we on our side have about 200 Boer prisoners. That briefly is the situation. At this moment there is nothing to prevent the Boers from coming straight through Natal. The best men from Maritzburg are already at the front; a scheme of town defence is being eked out with the mere remnants. Desperate letters appear in the papers urging, for example, that every man who can pull a trigger and crawl into a trench should be forced to defend the town. Now, what prevents the Boers from coming further south before our reinforcements arrive? Apparently they do not wish to leave so large a force as there is in Ladysmith in their rear. They wish to dispose of that force before they come on—confident that they can come on whenever they wish. This confidence in the ultimate issue

is no doubt misplaced, but in reviewing the situation one has to remember that it exists throughout the Boer army. The Boers appear, in short, to be trying to accomplish too much. What fact have they to face in the next week? The arrival, of course, of British reinforcements. Their true and immediate plan would, therefore, seem to be to impose as much difficulty as possible upon the advance of these reinforcements. This they could do by sending small parties to tear up the railway at different points. Estcourt and its patrols, even Maritzburg itself, could be avoided safely enough by slight detours. No one in these places can help knowing this quite well. That the Boers are hanging back is fortunate for Natal; let us understand clearly that the temporary loss of the whole colony of Natal is not a ridiculous supposition. In the circumstances, however, it seems more likely that our reinforcements will meet the Boers at or north of Estcourt, and then very hard fighting will follow.

The fighting is always bound to be hard, because we stand at a certain natural disadvantage. One has only to look round at the frequent kopjes covered with boulders and crevices which afford

shelter to the trained or the cunning to say, "This is Boers' fighting country, not ours." This natural disadvantage, since we were not born or trained to the country, we cannot hope to overcome. The British officer, with the manuals of tactics at his finger ends, is constantly finding himself in predicaments of which the manuals offer no solution; and however clever he be, his men are hard to extricate from their position, for their sturdy discipline is matched with an equally sturdy want of natural resource, intelligence, or eye for the country. The Boer knows the common features of the country like the palm of his hand; while British troops are mobilising he is, as it were, deer-stalking; the British officer leads a difficult movement prescribed for rare occasions, the Boer meets it by saying, "Come on, Piet," or "Come on, Oom." It is astonishing to us that the irregular should be in any respect superior to the regular, but is not this a new thing which the armies of Europe must allow in their calculations? This natural advantage of the Boers belongs to him only in the country of the kopjes or in very broken ground. In fair open country where British cavalry could perform their proper

functions the results would certainly be different.

The second great disadvantage from which we suffer we could overcome in time—it is the want of mounted infantry. Every Boer is mounted on his nimble-footed pony, which moves from one position to another with extraordinary quickness. What we want is not so much horses to charge on as horses on which to move about quickly. When we fully recognise these two great facts we shall be safe from the vulgar mistake of despising our enemy. It is a mistake which no officer here makes.

The campaign, young as it is, has readjusted our opinions in many ways. After Ladysmith and the battles round it, no man, unless he refused to rectify his sense of proportion, could speak with quite the old severity of Colley's unhappy failures in this same country. Colley had a few handfuls of men, and never once (whether at Laing's Nek, the Ingogo, or at Majuba) did he fight with even a composite force. It is a small, and perhaps a disproportionate reflection in the present serious circumstances, that this campaign should have helped to vindicate Colley

a very little ; but the reflection is something concrete, precipitated out of a general feeling. Again one might say that already this campaign has reduced to its true military dimensions the Jameson Raid—on military grounds an insolent and presumptuous freak of which no officer can speak now without annoyance.

CHAPTER III

EXCURSIONS AND ALARMS

ESTCOURT, *Wednesday, November 22nd, 1899.*

ESTCOURT is a village sunk in a cup of the pleasant and grassy uplands of Natal. It is a half-way house at which overheated people may pause in the summer flight from Durban to the mountains. And here, too, pause we who are concerned in the relieving movement towards Ladysmith. Yet we pause alone, for these are not times for a summer dalliance ; what visitors there are are not at the sanatorium, but they are persons whose necessary business is prosecuted under the eye of military authority ; the residents are gone, except a few storekeepers who linger to squeeze that profitable orange an army, and, fearfully tempting fortune, still keep about them the goods of which they may be deprived upon a single

mischance to the British army. The enemy crouches at our door, and with our present resources this place is scarcely defensible; the property of to-day is the easy loot of to-morrow.

While we have waited here we have fought with time, not with the enemy. Here is the situation. We cannot advance to the relief of Ladysmith till we have a sufficient force; meanwhile we have not only not a sufficient force to do that, but not a sufficient force to hold the place, to guard the capital, Maritzburg, indeed not to save any part of the colony. Will the Boers advance? Why do they not advance?

In my last letter I said something of the limitations of the Boer military mind—the inability to think of two things at once. Intent on the investment of Ladysmith, and confident of his power to advance when he pleases, the Boer wishes to be off with one job before he is on with the next. But a geographical fact takes its place with purely mental causes. The Tugela river lays between us and Ladysmith, and although there is a bridge across it the Boer is disinclined to make his retreat dependent on a bridge. Hence he has sent south of Colenso so far only large

foraging parties, and every day of quiet at Estcourt has lessened the anxiety, for if we have not received reinforcements every day, every day has brought their arrival nearer.

But I will not pretend that Estcourt camp has fought time with great expectation of success ; there has been rather a certain sense of inevitableness and a stoical resignation. " We have not got enough men to patrol these hills ; we have almost no guns to defend them. But we may as well send out what patrols we can, and keep our few men fit, and eat our dinner as usual and see what happens." That has been the tone of the camp. We have heard the guns at Ladysmith on many days, and from the hills we have seen their flashes and every day and every night we have expected to hear them and see them come nearer.

The locking up in Ladysmith of so large a part of the Natal Field Force has had an odd effect on the organisation of our minute army here ; work has been devolved on unforeseen shoulders, and redevolved and dovetailed and made to overlap until one scarcely knows whether a transport officer is not also provost-marshal and press-censor. Nor is there this satisfactory condition,

that every one feels that he is getting some of his work done by some one else; rather every one seems to think that some one else is invading his province. How can it be helped when the plans of the War Office have been inconsiderately upset by the Boers? But the people of Natal think everything can be helped, and it were useless to pretend that they are expending anything but hearty abuse on the army in Natal and, through it, on the Imperial Government. The Natal newspapers think that they are being kept in the dark like children, and they say so every day with growing vigour. "Why should we be treated contemptuously in our own country?" they ask. And one may go further and ask, "Is not Natal the most loyal colony, and are not the newspapers the instruments of loyalty?" This, then, is a change of front which is worth recording. For myself, I think, however, that this unsatisfactory stage will pass with the defensive stage of the war.

One other point may be added. The colonist has some contempt for every British-bred soldier, at least when the British-bred one is opposed to the Boers; but he also has, it would be unfair not

to add, a quite undue contempt for the Boer. Now the colonist is disposed already to speak of Sir George White as though he were a Colley, and to the South African that name signifies an unsullied ignorance of the conditions of warfare in South Africa.

After a few days of assiduous expulsion, all undesirables and suspected spies have been shot out from this almost wholly military camp. Perhaps those undesirables who give the least cause for suspicion give the most difficulty to the expeller. The following authentic scene is offered as proof:—

Enter the hearty but unaccredited representative of a San Francisco paper. He approaches the dignified and polite but highly rigorous Press Censor.

Censor. Let's see, is it you that wanted to speak to me about——?

American. Yes; I'm very glad to meet you, Major. I hear there's a sort of a difficulty. But I can explain it to you right here in two minutes——

Censor. But I understand you have not got a War Office licence?

American. No. That's right. But you see I

couldn't very well as I haven't been near London, and I thought as I was the representative of the San Francisco——

Censor (hoping to end the interview). I'm really awfully sorry, but you see I don't act on my own authority—you quite understand that—and as you have no licence it would be quite impossible——

American. Oh, I quite understand your position, old man, and of course you're quite right, and I don't bear you any grudge. But I suppose you've heard of the San Francisco——

Censor. No, really ; I'm afraid it's quite impossible.

American. You wouldn't know old Benjamin So-and-so then, my chief—a lovely man. You ought to know him ; you'd like him. It was for him I was imprisoned three weeks in Cuba.

Censor. I'm afraid really——

American (patting Censor on shoulder). Oh, I quite understand your difficulty—(*Censor makes deprecating motion*)—Well, have a drink.

Censor. No ; thanks very much.

American. Well ! This is the most tee-tee-total place !

Censor. I'm afraid I can't allow you to stay in camp. . . . Orderly! Show this gentleman to the railway station.

American. You needn't think now I don't see the difficulty, but I thought all the same— (*some civilians pass with cameras*). Well, say, I should like to have a photograph of you, old man. Say! (*Civilians pass on. Censor turns away.*) Well, goodbye, old man. Goodbye! (*Censor turns round. American holds out his hand. They shake hands. Censor is instantly occupied with new business. American goes off towards railway station guided by orderly.*)

The chief diversion of our life at Estcourt used to be (the past tense signifies a great tragedy) the daily start and return of the armoured train. We used to throng down to the station to see it off, and to hear its news on its return, much as people go down to see the boats at Dover pier. It was not really an armoured train at all; it was not an armoured train, that is to say, with trap doors and proper outlets for the muzzles of Maxim guns. It was made up of an ordinary engine and ordinary iron trucks belonging to the Natal Government Railway protected by boiler walls;

life. In a moment belts were being buckled, straps thrown across shoulders, helmets jammed on heads, putties wrapped feverishly round legs, and the tents—for the orders were to strike camp—the tents, with loosened guy ropes, were sinking to the ground like deflated balloons. The tents were packed and left ready to be moved; evidently it was not expected that we should be able to hold Estcourt.

The General and his staff took their position in the middle of the main street of the village and watched the rim of the hills round Estcourt. The Boers were said to be advancing on us along the Colenso and Weenen roads. The news had been brought in by cyclist scouts and by the magistrate and the Dutch minister of Weenen—the Dutch minister who, everybody says, came in a scout and went back a spy, for he and the magistrate returned to Weenen that night.

Our small garrison dotted itself along the rim of hills on the north and east of Estcourt; there were the Dublin Fusiliers, the Border Regiment, and the West Yorkshires, and the mounted troops—some of the Imperial Light Horse, the Natal Carbineers, and the mounted infantry of the 60th Rifles—

scouted forward. I was not allowed to go further than a spot about one and a half miles from Estcourt where our pickets were lying down in a firing line. Here I waited for hours and could see the Boers, not in great numbers, coming and going on the top of a table hill about three miles away and moving about a farmhouse at the foot of the hill.

They did not advance, and the expectation of an attack waned with the waning day. The Mounted Infantry came into contact with no more than 200 Boers and exchanged perhaps thirty harmless shots with them. But there was this unhappy uncertainty about the whole matter, that we had been unable to scout the country properly, and we knew not what force was at the back of the Boers we had seen.

When I returned to Estcourt, and the greater part of the troops had been drawn in, I found that the camp was what the soldiers call "jumpy." Were we going to stay or abandon Estcourt that night? The camp wore an air of vacillation, and vacillation is the blood-brother to demoralisation. The ground of the Dublins had sprung once more into a little white village, and no sooner had this

happened than, by orders, the white walls fluttered to the ground again and were packed ready to be moved. The troops were told to bivouac, that is, sleep in their blankets in the open, and the night—the nights here are chilling—fell with teeming rain. Already the heavy stores were being heaped on the trucks standing in the station.

There is an atmosphere of retreat which is unmistakable even before the final order has been given, and Estcourt now was wrapped in this atmosphere. Officers went about blue, and some “jumpy,” but all I met said it was monstrous that we should abandon Estcourt before we had been attacked or even seen many Boers ; and yet here was the curious thing, that there was a moment when every one firmly believed that we were going to abandon it. Perhaps none realised even then the seriousness of that moment. If Estcourt were abandoned there would be a rapid fall back towards Maritzburg, and imagine the effect on the troops, on the colony, on every one and everything, of this declension upon the almost unprotected capital! I do not know, and it would be considered scarcely my business to inquire, who was responsible for this grave moment. I know only

that within an hour the whole situation changed. It was a moral, not a physical, change ; no more troops had arrived, and we had no reason to believe that the Boers were less than vivid imaginations had made them, and yet within an hour the spirit of Estcourt was changed. At ten o'clock that night I knew that there was to be no retreat, no miserable night march, no military disgrace.

Colonel Long—he had succeeded in the command recently to General Wolfe-Murray—had heard all opinions, and now he had spoken. He had “stated in emphatic language what he'd be” before he would leave Estcourt. On the morrow we were to fight if the Boers would have it so ; the two naval twelve-pounders which had been brought down from the hill and put in the train were detrained ; Captain Haldane, of the Gordons (already shot in the foot in this campaign), was to take out the armoured train with a naval seven-pounder mounted on a truck and do just what he could and just what he liked ; operations were to begin with daylight, and, in short, Colonel Long, who commanded the artillery at Omdurman, and has commanded more artillery in action than any

British officer, was resolute to see now what he could do with almost no artillery at all.

A camp waiting every moment for an attack is an odd resting-place. The thud and hollow bang of goods being unladen in a tin shed at the railway station become the voice of artillery on the hills, and the bumping of a truck along the uneven sleepers is the best imitation I know of independent musketry fire. Twice that night I went outside my tent to listen.

At about 4.30 a.m. Mr. Winston Churchill, who was sleeping in my tent, woke me up to say that he was going in that death-trap, the armoured train, with Haldane. I said that he would either see too little or too much. We all know now that it was "too much," though even so—and as I write I do not know whether Churchill is alive or dead—I doubt whether the experience was too much for his astonishing fearlessness.

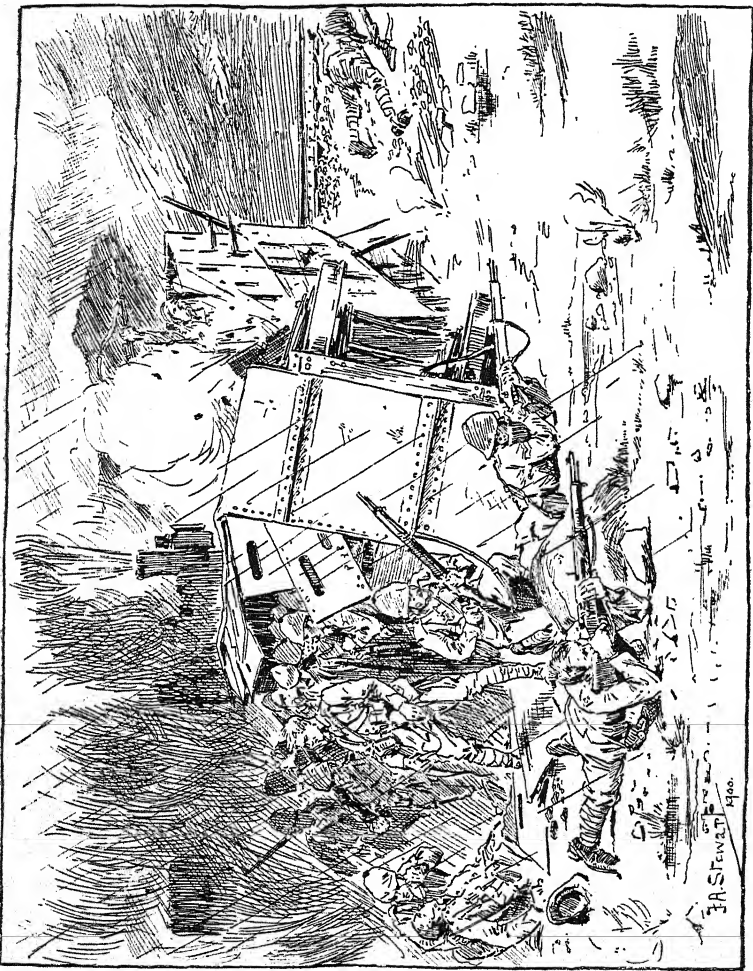
It must have been two hours later when we heard quick artillery fire in the direction of Colenso—the direction in which the armoured train had gone. Mr. Amery, of the *Times*, and I started off towards the firing, but on foot as our ponies were sick. About two miles from

Estcourt we heard the shrill whistle of the armoured train among the hills, and not long afterwards it appeared out of a gully close to us—but, behold, an armoured train no longer; only the armoured engine and a tender, and these crowded with clinging men! Men stood on the foot-plates of the engine, sat on the cow-catcher in front, and hung on to the sides of the tender; and when we ran to the track they waved their arms and pointed backwards and threw up their hands again, like men who would signalise something horrible. They were nearly all platelayers.

The train passed. We hurried on, struggling—for a soaking rain was falling now—over the khaki-coloured baked mud now become a slippery paste. About six miles up the line we met another platelayer from the train returning on foot—a yellow-haired, blue-eyed Scandinavian, but the blue eyes were now bloodshot, and the words came shortly and stumblingly from his mouth. He seemed anxious to talk too; and, indeed, his was an experience which a platelayer might count out of the common and worth communication.

He told us how the train had travelled to Chieveley station ; how the Boers had let it pass by, and then taken up a position behind it just as we had all prophesied ; how Captain Haldane had tried to run the train through between the two kopjes where the Boers were posted ; how when the train was bounding round the curves of this little railway two trucks had toppled over, perhaps of their own accord, perhaps because a shell had struck them, perhaps because there was an explosive on the line. And then into the midst of this railway accident, bad enough already, into the men crawling from under the trucks and among the wreckage, the Boers had poured rifle fire and the fire from a Maxim and three field guns. "Man !" said the Scandinavian platelayer, "I never saw nor heard anything like it."

Further up the line, at Ennersdale, we found twelve men from the Dublin Fusiliers and the Durban Light Infantry who had escaped from the disaster, and gradually we pieced the story together. We heard how Churchill had walked round and round the wreckage while the bullets were spitting against the iron walls, and had called for volunteers to free the engine ; how he had said, "Keep



THE ARMoured TRAIN DISASTER

cool, mén"; and again, "This will be interesting for my paper" (the *Morning Post*); and again how, when the engine-driver was grazed on the head and was about to escape, he had jumped in to help him, and had said, "No man is hit twice in the same day." The naval seven-pounder had been put out of action after firing three shots, and four out of the five sailors serving it had been bowled over.

At last the engine had been freed and had started homewards with some thirty men, fifteen of whom were wounded, and then Churchill and Haldane had turned back to help the Dublin Fusiliers and Durban Light Infantry who were still engaging the enemy, and were almost surrounded. There the story ends, at the moment in which Churchill and Haldane disappeared into the fight again.

Well, I devoutly hope Churchill is safe; but I half fear the gods love too much a man, only twenty-four years old, who has notable services performed in three campaigns already at his back, a man who can translate his thoughts instantly into apt and flowing language, a man with a taste in literature, the author of "With the Malakand

Field Force," and "The River War." He is that rare combination, the soldier, the reckless soldier even, and the bookman; and it is strange to hear the young soldier speaking in the words of the bookman to his taciturn fellow-soldiers without a trace of embarrassment or self-consciousness. He has the ability—invaluable to an orator—to finish a spoken sentence in grammatical form, and so it happens that since he has the faculty of quick literary imitation he is continually practising it in conversation. Sometimes it will be the sonorous Gibbonian sentence, sometimes the balance and antithesis of Addison, sometimes the strong confusion of Carlyle. This is the way to Parliament, whither he will carry, if he survive these perilous days, qualities that even his father had not. "On to success through notable performances; and if not through notability, then through notoriety; but anyhow, on to success!" That is the motto and the motive, and the humorous candour of their adoption is the singular attractiveness of a strong character.

Twice the hospital train has visited the Boer lines to ask for the wounded, and the Boers have replied, "There are three dead with us and nine

wounded, and the rest are prisoners. We can give you no names; you will see those in the Pretoria papers." Altogether seventy-five men of those who went out in the armoured train are missing.

This was the one incident of the day. This desperate plan of what was to have been a desperate day lost nothing of its desperation; but the other plans remained merely plans; there was practically no other fighting at all.

There is this to be said in extenuation of the armoured train tragedy, that it was not a foolish reconnaissance but a wild fighting act of which, once accepted, the risk was necessary. For this armoured train, as an instrument of reconnaissance, there is hardly anything to be said in extenuation. I speak on all military things with diffidence; but here I can speak with confidence, as I repeat the expressions of almost every officer in Estcourt. It is the greatest of ironies that Haldane should have been one of the chief condemners of the train. It is the greatest of mysteries that an instrument of which every one disapproved should have continued to be used.

The story we heard at Ennersdale was difficult

to extract from the Dublin Fusiliers, for with characteristic and jovial indifference they had already almost forgotten the armoured train, and were concerned only to praise the hospitality of some members of the Natal Police who were picketed at the railway station. "They've thrated us wonderful dacint," they said, "and we shall niver forget thim bhoys, whether it's in South Africa or in India or in Oireland oither." So saying, with their hands waving and the r's rolling in their mouths, they went away down the line.

Now we looked to the hills beyond Estcourt and saw a patrol of the Imperial Light Horse coming towards us at a gallop. But first a man, swaying on his horse and held between two comrades, came into the station yard. He had been shot in the upper part of the thigh. He could not ride further, and the patrol was retiring before the Boers, who were just beyond the crest of the hill. Amery and I helped him on to a trolley, and then pushed our unusual vehicle some miles towards Estcourt till we fell in with our old friends, the Dublin Fusiliers. They took the wounded man on with the utmost heartiness and merriment, and we have no doubt treated him "wonderful

dacint," though we thought it better to intervene once at the outset when a kindly Irishman produced a long knife and thought the pain of the wounded man would be removed if the bullet were dug out there and then.

For days we continued to fight against time. Every day troops poured into the village. The management of the little single-line railway from Durban was altogether masterly. Sidings were being hurriedly made at this simple station, until the fifty Kaffir labourers vanished upon the sound of artillery nearer than Ladysmith. We were almost surrounded, some said, and the Kaffirs were held to be the rats who leave the sinking ship. But communication with Maritzburg was still open, and we waited—still fighting time.

The first alarm had been sounded at Estcourt on Tuesday, November 14th, but it was not till Saturday, November 18th, that a considerable number of Boers came within plain sight of the village. A long, flat-topped hill four miles away was their main position, but strong parties came much nearer. On a high point of the Colenso road, just above the village, I found two scouts of the Natal Mounted Police being

fired at from a kopje at a range of about 800 yards ; on the railway below us a party of about fifty were lingering and stooping on the bridge over the Little Bushman's River, a mile and a half away—perhaps considering the best way to destroy it ; and behind a five-foot wall two miles distant a scarcely intermitted line of Boers moved from left to right on their ponies, jogging, trotting, or tripling. Soon a line behind the wall halted ; a few men came through a gap, others sat on the wall with their legs dangling.

Now the distance to the wall had been angle-measured, and at this moment the naval gunners at the back of Estcourt let fly the first shell fired here. The range was 8,000 yards. The shell struck the wall ; one man at least was laid on the ground, and men and ponies scattered in all directions. Almost at the same moment the Dublin Fusiliers, who were lining a kopje, fired three long-range volleys. The trend of the Boers from left to right was now confirmed ; all joined in the movement of the majority. Past the wall they went, jogging, trotting, tripling, and where the long wall ended they dipped behind a grassy shoulder of hill and disappeared. We knew that

they were passing to the west of Estcourt, and that another commando was already closing upon us from Weenen on the east, and we said, "The Boers are trying to get the line south of us and cut us off." We all knew this, I say, but nothing was done then to stop the movement. I suppose our troops were too few for anybody to be detached in a hazardous encounter from the not easily defended village. And so the enemy passed on untouched, working always from their left to right, trekking always to the west; with jogging, trotting, or tripling ponies, the thin line unwound itself like a ribbon from the reel, and in the afternoon the hills seemed empty of the enemy.

The adventure of two members of the Natal Mounted Police this day when scouting was splendidly audacious. At a turn of the path they found themselves face to face with two Boer pickets. On a common impulse, although hardly knowing what to do, they galloped at them. The Boers appeared to suppose that our scouts were their own men, and did not even raise their rifles. The next moment they found themselves being galloped towards the British camp with revolvers at their heads, and helped

on their way by the bullets of the rest of the Boer pickets, who had now approached and rendered them this questionable assistance. Admirable Mounted Police! No men have done better service than these have done. In constant scouting they have had Uriah's place, while their disciplined habit of mind has always helped them to consider themselves complimented thereby. Yet because their position lies half-way between soldier and policeman they do not always get a right share of that pure military glory which is part of the motive of the soldier. Their need of just credit is the greater, and they shall have it. To see them sweep by in a squadron is to see a thing of life and cohesion, as different from a hurriedly raised body of horse as an eight-oared crew of good watermen well together is from a ragged, disconnected crew of novices.

On Sunday, November 19th, all was quiet in Estcourt. The Boers had vanished into the hills; the country for miles round was clear of them; but we watched the long stretching hills as one watches water in which a diver has disappeared, knowing that when they did appear again it would be south of us. And so it was; that

evening our scouts found them on a long table hill on the skyline about ten miles from Estcourt.

Colonel Martyr was now at Willow Grange, about seven miles south of Estcourt, with some of the mounted troops, and he determined to make a night attack on the Boers' new position. There are two things from which the Boer has a peculiar aversion: one is a night attack, for he likes to spend his night peacefully, without even the trouble of a too exacting picket duty; and the other is the bayonet—cold steel. Both are of the genius of the British soldier. But on that evening Colonel Martyr was stopped by Colonel Kitchener (who thought our force insufficient) when he had actually begun his march forward. The notion of a night attack, however, had taken possession of the commander, for the next night one was arranged with greater deliberation. The advance on the enemy was to be made from Willow Grange.

I left for Willow Grange by the 10.30 train from Estcourt. Several officers were on board, Colonel Martyr among them—men whose eyes were shutting involuntarily after constant night duty, who were all alike preoccupied and yet all alert

stand up. They stood up. For over half an hour they remained without further order. And now the strange, dark redness, which is not light but is the promise of light, was curdling into bars in the east, and we knew that if there were to be an attack it would not be a night attack. The troops were moved a little further away from the station, and were paraded. In half an hour the light no longer streamed from the colonel's door ; the moon was insignificant ; it was dawn. Then came the sun ; the tension of waiting and anxious anticipation relaxed with a snap, and one could not help smiling to oneself because the night attack had become a sunlight parade on a pleasant mead.

But it seemed that something might still happen, and I must return to Estcourt for my pony, which I had not been able to bring the night before. Fortunately an armoured engine which had been down the line soon ran into the station, and I was allowed to travel on it to Estcourt. The engine was shut in all round with boiler walls, so that the driver could see nothing ahead of him. "How do you know that the line hasn't been pulled up?" I asked. "I don't," said he ; "I trust to Providence."

When I returned to Willow Grange General

Hildyard had arrived and the situation had been explained to him. About midday I set out with all the mounted troops for what seemed likely to be a reconnaissance in force. Five miles we rode in a long column, with the ambulance waggons bringing up our rear, and then we saw the enemy still on the top of their long, flat hill. We halted and watched them, cat-and-mouse fashion, for a whole hour, and then, as I was assured that nothing would happen that day, I rode back in advance of the troops to Willow Grange. But at Willow Grange I was not to have a rest after all. I had scarcely been five minutes in the station when the whole camp was alarmed. A commando of Boers was within half a mile of our picket—a commando unheard of, unsuspected. And the mounted infantry were five miles away watching a party of the enemy who did nothing more menacing than show themselves on the sky-line !

The infantry swarmed to the hills. Above the station there was a steep but low hill covered with ironstone boulders, which gave us excellent cover ; beyond that there was a higher ridge of the same hill ; then there was a small valley, and beyond that again there was the great, long, flat-backed hill,

with its nose pointed towards us, called Brynbella. It was on the second ridge of the small hill that the Boers had appeared. Their main body was on Brynbella. I ran up to the first ridge, alongside a lieutenant of the Border Regiment whose face was transfigured with excitement. Five minutes before I had seen him asleep on his back in the station ; now he ran, buckled his straps, panted, beamed, and remarked to me all in the same moment, " By Jove, only half a mile from my picket ! "

The rain had begun to fall and we had begun the ascent together, and now the rain was a cataract for force. " Lie down, men ! "—this as we reached the crest. " Off coats ! " The men half rose to throw their greatcoats off. " Keep your heads down there ! keep down. Keep down, will you ? Do you want the enemy," &c. Still two or three men kept their coats on behind large boulders, for the rain sluiced down without a thought of slackening. " Coats off there at once ! Do you hear what I say ? "

No shot had yet come from the second ridge, but the East Surreys on my left fired four or five shots—wild shots, I think, at doubtful figures.

" Now then "—it was the young officer of the Borders speaking—" at the double ! "

He leaped forward, ahead of his troop, and the men rose and ran forward in open order. No coats on now. I expected to hear s-s-s-s-s! s-s-s-s-s! now if ever, and to see the men drop. But no; across the open they went. The Boers had gone from their ridge, and no doubt had fallen back, concealed, on to Brynbella. Soon the whole of our first line occupied the second ridge. I stayed where I was, overlooking the station and the mead beyond it, to see the guns brought up and to watch for the cavalry. Here come the guns! But only two of the Natal Field Artillery guns, with a range at best of 3,500 yards—popguns the men call them.

On they came, merrily, up the first slope of the hill, with all the delirious rushing, clang, and clatter of artillery galloping. Then there came a check. The guns had encountered the steepness and the ironstone boulders. Back they went a little and then charged at the boulders, but it was no good, and the guns stayed where they were for orders.

Suddenly I looked across the mead beyond the railway line, and there, topping the edge, a mile away, was the emerging head of the thin snake-line of horsemen. This was opportune. They had been met on their way home and warned, and now

they came on at a gallop to the attack—to the attack, to the beginning, only now, of what they had already sought two days and a night without sleep. What a relentlessly exacting thing is war!

At the station they split into two columns ; one stole round the right of my hill, the other to the left, both towards Brynbella Hill. Now only to get the sticking guns forward and this would be a pretty attack! Already the Boers were creeping down Brynbella to meet us. I shall never forget that advance of their skirmishing lines, all the more significant because they were still out of range. It was simply a second nature, an impregnable instinct, which caused them to choose their steps like that, to steal from boulder to boulder, to drop down and creep and hide and keep watchful eyes, and yet all the while to advance and remember and preserve their skirmishing line until they reached a natural rampart of rocks and halted behind it. Will the British private ever learn to advance like that? I fear that only a life spent in this country—yes, and perhaps the inheritance of an instinct from a father and forefathers—could give him that cat-like intelligence.

But suddenly the appearance of things changed. I found the infantry supports behind me falling back to the station, and soon the movement set in through all the lines. Willow Grange was to be abandoned. It was thought to be indefensible. Already the baggage was being thrown into trucks in the station. The horsemen lingered round the flanks of the hill above the station to cover our retreat. The infantry were told to creep away so that the retreat might be as far as possible unobserved.

Let me record the rapidity with which it was accomplished; in a few minutes we were all—infantry, waggons, guns—stringing along the road to Estcourt, and we all arrived without being pursued, and without, so far as I know, leaving anything behind. A large mixed force came out from Estcourt to meet us, a rapidly moving body infantry lightly equipped, guns clattering, cavalry jingling. But we had no need of them to aid or quicken our retreat. The wire from Estcourt to Mooi River had been cut by the Boers earlier in the day. Now we had given them the line, and behold Estcourt was detached from the world.

It was an astonishing change, but a change

characteristic of war, from the night attack on our enemies to a retreat from them within twenty-four hours. The relieving force in Estcourt was itself in need of relief.

CHAPTER IV

THE WILLOW GRANGE ENGAGEMENT

ESTCOURT, *Monday, November 27th, 1899.*

WHAT am I to say of the work of our Intelligence Division? Willow Grange had been surprised by one body of the Boers while our mounted forces had been watching another body five miles away. Of course we have not had enough mounted scouts, and the lack has been solely a misfortune. But then we have not had proper maps of Natal either, and that lack has been worse than misfortune. To-day, for the first time, maps have been distributed to non-staff officers, and these are merely copies of a quite unmilitary map (without contours and the like) in the library at Estcourt. No doubt our maps of the Transvaal are excellent, but to go without maps of one's own country is the same presump-

tuous mistake that the French committed in the Franco-German War.

The Intelligence Division in its highest form is the diplomatic corps of the army; its members should be resourceful and experienced. For some weeks the head of the Intelligence Division here has been a lieutenant. That he should have been chosen at all for work so responsible, even when the field of choice was small, is to his great credit, and therefore these remarks are certainly not in the nature of detraction. He has been extraordinarily industrious; so close indeed has he been kept to his work that he has scarcely had time to ride a mile outside the village. But however able, however industrious, a lieutenant cannot have the resource of experience and the wisdom of age; and ought not one to be satisfied that the head of the Intelligence Division has all those qualities which are the outcome of ability, native wit, diverse information, knowledge of men, experience of life?¹

¹ I have since learned that Lieutenant Campbell, the officer referred to above, had travelled in the Transvaal before the war, and had made an estimate of the Boer strength in men and guns which has been completely

Whether or not it was the fault of the Intelligence Division, the Boers were safely on the top of Brynbella Hill, a position after their own hearts. The Boers demand one virtue, and with this they will not dispense, in any place which they make a camping ground. It must be a hill connected with another hill and commanded by it ; that is to say, it must be a ridge, or series of ridges, and not an isolated peak. If they are driven from their first position they have not only the next to retire to, but from the next (and this is the heart of the matter) they can make the first position untenable by the enemy who has taken it.

Brynbella was a sound choice, and the action proved it so. It is true that with the bayonet British troops can drive the Boers from a steep position nearly every time, but it is generally done with great loss to us, and at the top we find that the Boers are no longer there. Perhaps we are

vindicated. If anything he overestimated the numbers, and said that the artillery might become quite efficient with a little more practice. The Intelligence Division disregarded this report, and a "Confidential Report" was given to officers, which gave the traditional underestimate of the Boer numbers, and said that the guns were to a considerable extent rusty and useless.—J. B. A.

even told afterwards that "the Boers showed no disposition to fight." No, they did not show a disposition to fight according to our rules, but that is not a consideration which makes our loss more tolerable, any more than it is easier to bear a wound made by a thrust unpractised by the fencing masters. There is only one sane conclusion—to take one almost inaccessible position after another by the assaults of infantry is a glorious but unprofitable task. We must use more and more cavalry and mounted infantry for quickness of mobilisation and pursuit, and we must make up our minds to lose many of them. This is not a Soudan campaign moving like a steam roller across the desert ; this is not a campaign in which we can make our railway constantly follow us ; it is here, there, and everywhere, and it can conceivably be carried through well only by mounted forces.

In my last letter I left the Boers who surprised Willow Grange encamped on Brynbella Hill. We in Estcourt, by our abandonment of Willow Grange, were cut off from all communication, and it seemed that in a few hours Estcourt would be another Ladysmith—a cup in which troops

should sit patiently while shells were dropped into it from the hills. This, I say, seemed likely to happen unless something were done to prevent it. Already the Boers were moving on the long back of Brynbella towards Estcourt. Now what was done is the story of the Willow Grange engagement.

On Wednesday, November 22nd, at 2 p.m., troops marched out of Estcourt towards the Boer position. The plan was to occupy and place a naval gun on the boldest hill outside Estcourt, the hill known variously as Beacon Hill (a name which is the gift of this campaign), Klobber's Kop, Griffin's Hill, or Umkumwana, which means the Hill of Mists. Beyond Beacon Hill, south-westwards, there is a comparatively low ridge with easy grass country sloping away from it on both sides, and beyond that again is Brynbella, not pointing its nose towards one, as I had seen it from Willow Grange, but presenting to Beacon Hill the extent of its long steep flanks.

The Natal Carbineers led the way out of Estcourt, and were followed by a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, the East Surreys, the West Yorks, the 7th Battery R.A., the Natal Royal Rifles, and the Durban Light Infantry. Two

spans of oxen, the bluejackets belonging to the naval gun, and the Carbineers all tried their tempers and their strength before the twelve-pounder was got to the top of the Hill of Mists. The hill was enveloped now with nothing so gentle as mists, but with hail (the accompaniment of a tremendous thunderstorm) that brought men to a standstill as against a wall and bruised their hands and faces.

No sooner had the gun achieved the summit than the Boers fired three shells at it, and as many were returned by the twelve-pounder. Then night closed in; the troops, except the Carbineers, bivouacked, drenched and overwrought, in their positions; the Carbineers returned into Estcourt with marks of the storm on their bodies—one with his forehead cut from a hailstone two inches in diameter, another with his helmet dented and his thumb enormously swollen, and so on; and as for the horses, it was with difficulty that they had been prevented from stampeding. Till 2 a.m. on Thursday morning the bivouacking troops traversed rest by lying in the open in a storm memorable for violence. Rain fell continuously; the skies were splitting from end to end with that

sound, common to near and virulent thunder, which suggests the rending of canvas. The men were without their coats; in their thin khaki uniforms, many of them, as an officer told me in the morning, groaned aloud in an abandonment of misery and cold. And this was their preparation for an act—the assault of Brynbella in the dark—which required a sublime example of “2 a.m. courage.”

The attack was made by the West Yorks and East Surreys, who advanced in alternate companies up either side of the long wall which continued to the top of the hill. They had been told to keep a bright look-out for the enemy, and did so with such zeal that a few of them thought they saw Boers at the bottom of the hill! There was panic firing for a few moments by both regiments, and in each regiment some men were killed down there by shots fired from the other, but Colonel Kitchener simply marched straight on with great coolness, and actually did not allow this sad mistake to delay the advance for more than a couple of minutes. The casualties inflicted in this manner were the only injuries received by our men in the assault, for the single Boer sentry who gave the

alarm was instantly shot through the heart, and the enemy disappeared incontinently on to the second ridge of the hill, leaving behind them several ponies, about 200 saddles, some equipment, and the sentry's body. Light dawned on the position as it was won, and discovered the main body of the enemy in considerable strength more than 2,000 yards away.

Soon the Boers, true to their tactics, began to shell and make untenable the position which they had just left. And under the shell fire came forward their riflemen; Mauser bullets were added to the shower of assorted missiles from a Hotchkiss, a Vickers-Maxim, and Krupp fieldpieces. A long wall across the brow of Brynbella would have been a reasonable protection to our infantry had not the Boers crept far enough round the hill to open an enfilading fire. I scarcely know on the evidence which to say was the better—the Boers' rifle or artillery fire. Both were first-rate, and if many of the shells did not burst that was not through the fault of the gunners, but through the venality of a contractor.

About 6 a.m. our infantry on Brynbella were ordered to retire from their little inferno. Heaven

help them in their retreat across the large open patch of grass behind the wall! That was bullet-swept; but bullets are invisible; it was enough for the eye of one watching from Beacon Hill, as I did, to see that the ground leaped in fountains where the shells struck.

When the retreat was commanded, seven men of the West Yorks did not—some say would not—hear the order, and in a brave little detached body continued long to fire on the advancing Boers. But the fact is that most of our infantry on Brynbella were staggered with exhaustion, and they were ordered to retire for food and rest as much as for their salvation. The Queen's and the Borders, who were on Beacon Hill, were not used in any practical sense as supports. Back across the low ridge and the open grassland lying between Brynbella and Beacon Hill came the retreating infantry, and the shells followed them as they came. Here, there, over, and in between went the shells, and the whole expanded and dotted field of infantry moved slowly homewards untouched. It is this marvellous restraint of a well-directed shell-fire that always makes a battle seem an incredible thing. Happily the Boers did

not fire shrapnel, and common shell that does not even explode on striking—that is to say, which injures you only if it hits you bodily in its passage—is almost negligible.

It was not really till the infantry had retired that the mounted troops went seriously forward. Round the flanks of Beacon Hill they advanced in two columns; that on the right was exposed to shell-fire which looked searching, but was actually ineffective, and the column did not go very near the enemy's position. The column on the left, small and heroic, was what held one's eyes. Up the shoulders of Brynbella it went; the men dismounted in the last hollow and advanced on foot till they actually reached the position just abandoned by the West Yorks and East Surreys, not even knowing, as they told me afterwards, that it was an untenable place.

The small force was only about 150 strong; there were some of the Imperial Light Horse, the mounted infantry of the King's Royal Rifles under Captain Eustace, and the whole detachment was under Colonel Martyn. At the wall—always to be remembered by those who were there—the new force halted, and the I.L.H. were soon busy help-

ing the wounded infantrymen, some of whom were not yet away from the hill. The miscellaneous Boer fire reopened; the 150 men were unsupported—they were, in fact “in the air”; in front of the wall the lead was strewed as though the place was a rifle butts. Yet a handful of men here and a handful there crept further along the back of the hill, using for cover patches of the diorite, or igneous boulders, which make rugged all the hills of Natal. Using the like cover, the Boer skirmishing lines came on too.

All this time I was on the top of Beacon Hill with the naval twelve-pounder. Desultory shots were fired from it, but the rest of the artillery scarcely came into action. We may as well have the truth—the “finest artillery in the world” did very little against the Boer guns; it was for the greater part outranged. I do not suppose a gunner has often had a more tantalising task than Lieutenant James had with his twelve-pounder that day on the Hill of Mists. Not one of the enemy’s guns could he see—could any of us see, though there was a good party of us gathered round the gun, and we lay flat on the ground for steadiness and devoured Brynbella with our

glasses; not a flash, not a curl of gun-smoke, not an inkling of where the guns were, but there plain enough were the crash and reverberation in the opposite hill and the shells striking behind the wall on Brynbella or in the grassland (which was the line of retreat) below us.

An orderly came on to the hill. "The General's compliments," said he, and "he says will you please silence the enemy's Vickers-Maxim."

I remember James's face of despair. He was tingling to do something, but where on earth was the enemy's Vickers-Maxim?

"Look here," he said to the orderly, "have you been out there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you know where the enemy's guns are?"

"Oh, yes, sir;" and then with all the vague prolixity of the communicative private, the orderly began to tell us where the shells were striking, but little enough to guide us to their position.

"But the Vickers-Maxim—where is the Vickers-Maxim?"

"I don't rightly know, sir——"

"Do you know what a Vickers-Maxim is?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it's the gun that goes pom-pom-pom—like that; now do you know?"

"No, sir."

Despair settled on every one. James did all that he could in the circumstances; he shelled the two front lines of Boer skirmishers, one in a patch of boulders, the other in a donga which reached down the side of the hill. From both places we could see the little spirts of rifle smoke continually darting. First a "sighter" of common shell was fired; none of us saw it strike.

"Did any one see that?" James asked. I knew it was not above the Boer lines, as I had been watching there, and I told him so.

"It must have been below, then."

The next shell struck just below the patch of boulders. After that the shells fired were shrapnel; they burst apparently over the Boer lines, and the skirmishers instantly rose up and ran back to a wall which lay behind them. These lines had come, I should say, within 800 yards of our forward skirmishers. These were the lines I had seen advancing the whole morning, but somehow, as I was told afterwards, a small party of Boers had got within 100 yards of our 150 men

"in the air." How did they do it? Well, one would have to be a Boer to know that. A little before noon our mounted troops were fairly retiring—the 150 "in the air" had done very well to take so long in finding out that their position was untenable—and when the Boers came to help them on their way with shells we saw for the first time the range of the enemy's largest gun. The mounted infantry on the right side of Beacon Hill came nearer and nearer home, and the shells kept pace with them. Surely that last one was the limit of the gun's range. No! There was another further, and then another further than that, and yet another further than the last, until the shells were falling over a mile and a half on the Estcourt side of Beacon Hill. Fortunately none of these burst. They were fired at a great elevation, I should think, for one that I had intimate knowledge of passed over the saddle of my pony as I was leading him down on the Estcourt side of Beacon Hill and ploughed up the ground a little way beyond, and this was on a steep part of the hill where none but a shell dropping from a height could come.

We all retired into Estcourt. The Boers did

not follow us, for with them, as with the Turks, sluggishness is the counterpart of a stolid bravery. After a victory the Turk sits down, smokes, and perhaps observes a Bairam ; the Boer lies down and sleeps; and in both cases exposed lines of communication are left uncut. To a layman who watched the Willow Grange engagement without understanding the intentions of General Hildyard it seemed that the result of the battle was this—a hill had been taken and was subsequently abandoned, and it had been proved that the Boers had a gun with a far longer range than had any of ours, and meanwhile the enemy had saved his position. And to obtain this result we lost twenty dead (that is to say, twenty were killed or afterwards died of their wounds), and about seventy wounded. To the layman, I say, it seemed that there had been a considerable loss to effect—well, nothing ; but General Hildyard rode into Estcourt about lunch-time, looking well content, and he said that, though he deeply regretted the losses, he had achieved his object.

CHAPTER V

FORWARD, BY THE GRACE OF THE ENEMY!

FRERE, *Tuesday, November 28th, 1899.*

FRIDAY, November 24th, was the day after the Willow Grange engagement. The railway line north and south of Estcourt was still in the enemy's hands; the action had not helped us to join hands with the force at Mooi River; in short, Estcourt was still cut off from the world, and seemed even more likely than before to be shelled instantly by the enemy. Men were raising their eyes up to the surrounding hills, and already some of the railway staff, thinking the first shells would be directed to the station, had built themselves bomb-proof retreats. Neighbouring farmers, surprised and rendered homeless by the sudden march of events, were gathered in Estcourt and lectured us all on the futility of non-colonial

strategy, cursed their loyalty, or reckoned their losses by the cattle straying on a thousand hills, and destined to be driven north by the Boers. Any time the next two days the dead and wounded were still being discovered and brought in by searching parties on the scene of the fight; the tinkling bell of the little church tolling the dead to their graves was a frequent sound, and the slow, dismal funeral procession, with the weird appearance which is imparted to it by the rifles carried butt-end first was a common sight.

Some of the wounded were brought in after they had been treated by the Boers. They seemed well pleased with their treatment in the enemy's camp where, one who smacked his lips told me, they had had chicken broth. On the other hand, a few seemed to have been managed ignorantly by the Boer doctors, and I saw one of these poor fellows who was dying quite unnecessarily of gangrene.

A word about the dishonourable or inhuman behaviour attributed by some of the newspapers on each side to the other side. I see in some Pretoria papers "atrocities" charged to the British arms; so far as I have seen the treatment of Boer prisoners

the charges are quite ludicrously untrue, and from what I have seen of the spirit of British troops in this campaign I should say that they would not cease to be so. In like manner misbehaviour has sometimes been ludicrously charged to the Boers. At the action of Brynbella Hill I heard a man lying on Beacon Hill say, "They're firing at the ambulances again," and one of his comrades replied, "Oh, they ain't particular." At that moment shells were certainly falling near the ambulance waggons, but the waggons were moving along at the back of Beacon Hill where they were completely hidden from the Boers, and so far as I know the Boers are not less unable than ourselves to see through a hill, nor is it more incumbent upon them than upon us to cease firing upon something which is a fair prey, because ambulance waggons drive into the zone of danger. One thing in any case might be done to lessen danger. It is hard at the long range possessed by modern weapons to distinguish things quickly and accurately, and I think the red cross on the ambulance waggons should certainly be painted larger. Why, instead of being a small cross in one place, should it not be painted over the whole

length and breadth of the white hood? As it is, I should not accuse myself of short-sight if, at two or three miles distance, I mistook most of our ambulance waggons for ammunition waggons.

Again, I heard it said on Beacon Hill that the Boers had hoisted a white flag and were still firing. It was some time before I could get evidence as to the spot where the white flag was, and when it was pointed out to me I found that it was a white horse which had been lying dead all the morning on the side of Brynbella. On the other hand there seems to be no doubt that at Ladysmith the Boers sent an officer of artillery into the town disguised as the driver of an ambulance waggon. In any case camp gossip, and camp "shaves," are the gospel of Tommy, and it were almost a cruelty to deprive him of them, especially when one sees that his credulity can, with charming lack of logic, run side by side with the straightest and manliest convictions to the contrary, based on his own experiences. The wounded men who had been treated in the Boer camp were all agreed that their captors "meant to be very decent chaps," and the proof of this was that they had offered their prisoners cigarettes and had been sedulous in shaking hands

with them. "It's not you fellows we want to shoot," one of the Boers had said, "it's the officers." The mortality among the officers proves the remark true enough, and the absence of casualties amongst officers at Brynbella was perhaps due to the fact that there the officers, or most of them, modified their distinctive marks and sank their identity in the ranks by carrying rifles. Wisdom in South African warfare will perhaps spread from so brave and trusted a mentor as Colonel Baden-Powell, and will in time overcome the proud but costly tradition of the British officer.

To return to my wounded men—one of them was astonished rather than resentful at having been examined as to his religious beliefs. "Are you a Christian?" a Boer asked him. "No," said Tommy, the brazen infidel. "Then you can never win battles," said his captor. Tommy thought that an odd sequence, but the philosopher will see that a conviction, or even a superstition, of that quality is after all a concrete weapon which the serious calculator must set against guns and ammunition in his reckoning. One man confident is better than two without confidence of whatever origin; and the spirit of,

say, one hundred men who have made themselves victors by prayer must be met by (let one say) an extra field piece with a range of at least 6,000 yards. When one comes to think of it, there is a curious contrast in this war—the Boer with his simple system of commando, his lack of conventional military rigour, his obedience, when all has been said, to one man ; and ourselves, to whom war has become, by the traditions of a class, a sort of service game with medals and *kudos* for prizes. It is *kudos* versus Kruger in one, perhaps not the deepest, of its aspects.

The two days after Brynbella were certainly a gloomy time in Estcourt. I know of only one incident that tempered them and that was due, characteristically, to the Dublin Fusiliers. When Estcourt came to be shelled, as we expected it would be, we should have no gun with which to match that extraordinary long-range weapon of the Boers which had appeared at Brynbella. Therefore the Dublin Fusiliers thought that this forty-pounder, as it was supposed to be, would be better out of the way. They sent a formal "requisition" to the General demanding that they should be allowed to capture it, and the General answered

that he would allow them to try if he saw a good opportunity. Here was a spirit indeed—after all the losses and hardships of the fighting north of Ladysmith, after becoming kitless and homeless, after losing nearly a whole company in the armoured train disaster, after having their number reduced to about 630, formally to requisition the General that they should be allowed to sacrifice themselves in an assault on the great gun! In war the Dublins may easily be forgiven the military eccentricities which are the sorrow of their officers in peace. A fatalist or a fanatic is a hard man to beat in battle, but perhaps the man of unquenchable high spirits is harder.

How could one correct or extinguish the spirit of the hero in this little narrative?—An officer saw a private of the Dublins riding into Estcourt on a Boer pony, to which, as the officer suspected, with a penetration that was not likely to err in the circumstances, the rider had no right. Obviously the rider had never been on a horse before. The officer thought there was good reason to stop him.

“What are you doing with that horse? Where did you get it?”

"If you plaze, sorr," was the answer, "I met a gintleman, I think he was a Boer, an' the gintleman, he sez, 'Ye'll have to come along wid me, young man,' an' I sez, 'All right, sorr;' but me roifle happened to be loaded, an', if you plaze, sorr, it wint off furrst!"

"And where are you taking the horse to now?" the officer demanded.

"I'm going to join the mounted infanthry," said the man.

And was it not a member of the same regiment into whose hands a Boer officer fell after the battle of Dundee? The Boer, about to be looted, thought to save his property by pleading his dignity.

"I'm a field-cornet," he said.

"An' if ye were a field-thrumpet it would make no difference at all," said the Irishman; "ye'll have to shell out, ould man."

On Saturday, November 25th, I accompanied a party of cavalry who made a reconnaissance westward from Estcourt. On all sides the scouts had told us that the Boers were trekking north, and the cavalry marched towards Ulundi—not the Ulundi of the Zulu War, of course—in the hope of cutting off some of the waggons and cattle.

A party of the enemy was seen, but was considered too powerful to be attacked, and the cavalry returned without doing anything. That night there was no longer a doubt about the movement of the enemy; they were moving bodily north with their guns and waggons, and driving before them all that they needed of the sleek cattle of Natal.

And so Estcourt was not to be shelled after all; by the act of the enemy the relieving force was relieved. The Boers had discovered, what we had not yet proved to them, that the position they occupied between the 6,000 odd men of Estcourt and the 8,000 odd men of Mooi river was too precarious. Also, as we discovered from dispatches taken on Boer prisoners, they were being drawn back by news of the British advance from Cape Colony.

Now what was this force of Boers which had raided Natal, chosen its own routes, selected its cattle, hauled guns which outranged ours on to almost impregnable hills, cut off in Estcourt part of the force which was meant to relieve Ladysmith, and caused the pickets of Mooi river to fall back closely on to the village? I do not know that our

scouts were ever able accurately to determine the numbers, but I have the evidence of a well-known and intelligent farmer who stayed in his home near Weenen after the district had been occupied by the Boers. He kept his cattle, saved his home, and conversed daily with the Boers. His evidence was this: that the party of the enemy which had passed west of Estcourt towards Willow Grange a week before was, roughly, 650, and that the body which had passed east of Estcourt through Weenen was, roughly, 3,000. The two bodies after skirting Estcourt had joined near Willow Grange. For myself, I should say that the Boers who passed west of Estcourt were certainly more than 650; let me say at the outside, however, 2,000. As to those who passed by his own home, through Weenen, he must be allowed to know better. The conclusion is that the Boers who raided Natal south of Ladysmith numbered at the most about 5,000 men.

At dawn on Sunday, November 26th, there was but one story—the Boers had vanished; the hills were empty; Estcourt was safe; forward, by grace of the enemy, forward! Already troops were dropping in from Mooi River; in a few

hours the line was reopened and the wires mended; and along all the road north towards Frere moved one long, slow line of cavalry, troops, guns, waggons, teams of sixteen oxen, teams of mules ten-in-hand (often enough ten-out-of-hand), equipment, the pantries and the kitchens of an army, bakers, cooks, farriers, followers of all sorts, doctors, bearers, ambulance waggons—the wonderful dusty spectacle of an army moving. Forward! The tide had turned; you could see it in men's faces. And to signalise the turn some one of importance arrived the next morning quite unexpectedly—some one who had come to find out just what had been happening in Natal all this time.

Sir Redvers Buller was in Pietermaritzburg.

CHAPTER VI

WE COLLECT OUR STRENGTH

FRERE, *Thursday, December 7th, 1899.*

I N my last three letters I gave a bare narrative of the events round Estcourt ; if there was any irony in the narrative it was "the irony of literal statement" ; irony was the only commentary which escaped me. But it is necessary to correct even the small licenses of irony. It may be said that the inactivity which allowed the Boers to raid Natal, south of Ladysmith, till they came within an easy distance of Maritzburg, if not exactly masterly, at all events served a quite deliberate purpose. It may be said that it was intended to keep—to entertain, if you like—those detached commandoes among the rich cattle country of Natal, because first the pressure on Ladysmith would be somewhat relieved thereby, and secondly, while

nothing was risked and no lives were lost in Natal, the Boers would still for all purposes be driven back sooner or later, since no one doubted that the news of the British advance on the southern border of the Free State would draw them back to defend their homes. In this view the price of success was merely the wrecking of a few hundred homesteads and the loss of thousands of cattle in Natal. The farmers alone stand out against the possibility of this view. It is a view that demanded statement; but for myself I think there are considerations which outweigh its value.

The Generals south of Ladysmith, in Natal, may indeed have been ordered not to provoke a general engagement, but that they enjoyed tolerable freedom of action is proved by one fact—the Willow Grange engagement. Give a man freedom to undertake an operation of that extent, and he is equally free to arrest detached columns of Boers driving north their waggons and their acquired cattle, or to impede parties dispatched to wreck the line or blow up the bridges. The arrival of Sir Redvers Buller at the front, in Natal, showed that he had altered what are generally understood to have been his original plans and come

to pull things straight. Let us suppose then that things have been let slide or even bungled. Is that a desperate admission? Rather one might think that something of a muddle to begin with was the necessary stimulus to every British campaign. "This is a muddle worth retrieving" is after all a considerable motive. Perhaps the historian will thus be induced to attribute to us the truest quality of the soldier—the ability to play an uphill game. We are muddlers often enough, but then we muddle on till the muddle comes right, and in the end it will be found that the victors and the muddlers are the same; and the War Office is righted after all, even though it be riddled with criticism and red all over with tape.

A popular view of war makes it all excursions and alarms. But the real campaign is a series of long waits, terminated and introduced by a battle; even in what seemed to be the crowded hours of the short Greek war there were only six days' hard fighting in thirty days. At Frere we are now spending a period of deep and peculiar calm, a calm significant because it is itself a symptom of the storm. It is a period of preparation—the machine is being perfected—and it

will end, if the Boers stay in their present position near Colenso, in one of the great battles, perhaps the greatest battle of the campaign. When the Boers trekked north from Estcourt they passed safely across the Tugela, which they had long hesitated to cross, and never greatly liked to feel lay behind them, and sat down upon the hills above Colenso.

On their way they destroyed the iron railway bridge across the river at Frere—a job that gladdens the professional eyes (even though it be to their own disadvantage) of the users of explosives from the mines. It is a beautiful job. The bridge has been lifted bodily from its masonry piers and lies in the river bed, the iron framework and girders contorted like a tangle of forest creepers. The country for a few hundred yards round was bombarded with shell-like pieces of iron. Only one omission makes the job short of perfection; the masonry piers are uninjured. They were loaded with explosive, but as an expert explained to me, it was put in horizontally instead of diagonally and so had not the necessary lifting power. “But,” said my expert with gracious professional condescension, “the man that did the job

wasn't doing his first job by any manner of means." Electric wires lay about the wreckage, from which we gather that the explosion was caused by electricity.

Frere bridge is the first of a series of scientific disasters that we shall view as we go north. Already the great railway bridge over the Tugela at Colenso has been destroyed—a bridge over 200 yards long that cost £80,000; the fine road bridge near it is charged with explosive but is not yet destroyed; and after these we shall find the wrecks of the series of bridges at difficult places all the way to the north of Natal. Frere bridge has been replaced by a trestle bridge and a diverted embankment, both built not by the engineers, but by the staff of the Natal Government Railways. Two days ago the first train passed over it.

There are three things that vie with one another in the speed with which they change the face of the country—a bank holiday, a race meeting, and a camp. Ten days ago Frere was a little dark-green plantation hiding a few iron-roofed houses, and set in the midst of a heaving sea of downs. Then a camp came, and to-day there is a patch, nearly two miles square, of brown, trodden, and

dusted grass with brown tracks radiating from it into the grassy distances. To Frere the damage of the enemy's occupation has been less than we have necessarily inflicted ourselves. The Boers looted the houses, but there were few to loot. The damage they did strikes one as so curiously petty and trifling that one looks round for their interesting motive. To burn every house, as the Turks do, is an intelligible act, because, even though the motive be mainly savagery, the result is to deprive the enemy of shelter. But the Boers made no attempt to burn; they did nothing to make a house useless. What they did was this: they took books and tore out the leaves and scattered them everywhere; they pulled drawers out of chests and broke them; they ripped open mattresses and distributed the flock with amazing industry equally over the floors and stairs; they burned photographs; they broke the glass of pictures and windows; they stuffed clocks upside down into flower-pots; and they pulled up flowers in the garden and threw them in at the windows. In short, the damage they did did not call for the hand of the carpenter or the builder so much as for the labour and patience of a charwoman.

About a mile beyond Frere station towards Colenso lies the wreck of the armoured train—a melancholy heap—one truck on its side (a military cobbler using it as his shop), another upside down with its wheels sticking up in the air, two others standing on the line. There at the curve, at the bottom of the decline down which the train tilted at full speed after the enemy had been seen, is the broken rail successfully designed to send the train to destruction; and there on either side of the line are the ridges, profitably close, from which the Boers poured their fire. The trucks are ripped through and through with shells—the holes round and clean as a whistle where the shells came in, and jagged and gaping where they passed out—and spattered over with the marks of lead. And beside the wreckage is a more melancholy sight still—the little mound that covers impartially the poor fellows of the Dublin Fusiliers and the Durban Light Infantry who were killed and buried by the enemy.

Round the grave the devotion of the Border Regiment has placed a stone border, and at the head erected a tombstone and a little cross of wire. On the tombstone are chiselled the words

(displaying a *naïf* inaccuracy that one would not have altered for worlds, seeing that it clearly assigns the whole invention to the generosity and the brains of the private soldier): "Here lieth the remains of those who were killed in the armoured train on Nov. 15th, 1899." On the grave itself there is studded with empty cartridge cases, many of course used by the dead men themselves, this inscription: "Erected by the Border Regiment in Memory of our Comrades." Here, one foresees, is a monument destined to last, destined to be renewed when it becomes obscure, and always to provide a Mecca for the excursionist.

I found a private of the Borders one morning melting in the hot sun while he fiercely chiselled at the inscription on the tombstone; another was plastering the cement into the stone border round the grave; a group of soldiers lounged round watching and smoking. Then we did not know how soon we might be ordered to move on from Frere; and "You'll 'ave to buck up, ole man, to get it finished," said one of the on-lookers. "Go on!" said the chiseller, who took out his pipe, spat, and continued chiselling fiercely. It was finished in plenty of time after all, and

yesterday the grave was consecrated with a joint service held by two Church of England chaplains and one Roman Catholic.

Perhaps 2,000 troops were gathered round the spot; closer to it were Prince Christian Victor, General Hildyard and his staff, and others. After the service the buglers played the "Last Post"; but the firing party which was present did not after all fire over the grave, because the rule at the front is that there should be no unnecessary noise "in the presence of the enemy." Those who remain of the Dublins were the last to leave the ground, and they were marched away winding round the grave in a thin column. "Company So-and-so, eyes left!" was the order as each company passed the grave. For a moment each man cast his eyes on the sad little monument underneath which his comrades lay, and then "Eyes right!" and away he went, looking rigidly in front of him, with an official term imposed upon his grief.

When the tail of the column had disappeared the grave remained alone for a little hushed interval, and then detached soldiers not on duty came hurrying across the ground to study it with added interest. The ceremony was over. Thus

the private soldier is made to feel that he is cared for and treated with dignity in death, even though his identity be expressed by "No. 32456."

As I went back to my tent after this ceremony I found another grave, a result of the same disaster, beside the line, nearer Frere—a humble, pathetic little grave where more men of the Dublins had fallen in their retreat. "A Company, R.D.F.," was picked out in flint stones on the sides of the mud; in the grasp of a clamp made of twisted tin was a scrap of paper on which some Irish soldier had written in pencil, with the tenderness of the Roman Catholic, "Pray for the souls of our dear comrades," and at the head of the grave perhaps the same hand had stuck in the earth a picture, torn from a book, of the Madonna and Child.

Daily the camp grows bigger as the troops are concentrated, as the machine is perfected that is to be launched to the relief of Ladysmith. The spirit of Frere is different from that of Estcourt; the notion of advancing is no doubt something, but the arrival of Sir Redvers Buller is almost everything. I have never seen troops re-tempered like this by one man since I saw the extraordinary change which came over the

American army on the sudden arrival of General Miles before Santiago. It is certain that we shall not advance before Sir Redvers Buller has collected all the troops that he can reasonably use. Some of the horses will need time to recover even after they have arrived, but on the other hand Ladysmith cries out to be relieved. At least we shall try this time to match, if not better, the range of the Boer guns. Already some 47 naval guns, or forty pounders, stand in the camp, and the sight of them is specially cherished by the infantry, whose path is made easy or rough only by guns, guns, guns. Meanwhile we wait in our symptomatic calm, feeling that its depth is intenser by comparison with what is to be.

Routine, however, is routine, and that goes on for ever. Every morning the camp stands to arms at 4 a.m. At that dark hour I have seen troopers kicking their tired horses in the ribs to make them stand up; and a little later, if there is early reconnaissance work to be done, the squadrons are clearly parading, the sun is showing over the great, green, swelling downs and pinking the white-walled town of tents. Another day has begun. The squadrons are off in the green and pink light,

or if not they are back to their tents to have some more sleep. Evening is often more memorable than sunrise; there is then a furnace of a sunset behind the Drakensberg, and the great, solid, serrated range is wrapped in a blue, dusky atmosphere of smoke—the sunset atmosphere which belongs to a land of grass-fires—like the bloom on a black grape. These are times when men have the opportunity to bathe, and the river is dancing all day with soldiers washing themselves and their clothes. The river is khaki-coloured—everything is khaki-coloured here—the muddy banks, the water, the baked roads, the trodden camp, the diorite boulders—so that the use of khaki uniforms is a triumph of what the man of science calls protective mimicry.

The Provost-Marshal has made a few excursions to neighbouring farms, and collected evidence against those who are suspected of disloyalty. I think if the suspicion is warranted now, men like Pretorius and Labuschagne, members of the Natal Parliament, should have been arrested long ago. As it is the evidence seems to be that they fed the burghers; one can conceive that the most loyal farmer in Natal, who happened to have

stayed on his farm, would have done as much, recognising that his farm now lay in the enemy's country, and fearing that his life was the cost of refusal. Splendid, if inevitable, paradox, that a man should be arrested for feeding the burghers, the object of the war being to make it possible for that man to become their fellow-citizen !

A long wait in camp enables one to know one's fellow campers a good deal better. When you have given a man a nickname you may reckon that you know him well ; and there is scarcely a colonial force that has not been nicknamed now. Bethune's Mounted Infantry are "Bethune's Buccaneers ;" Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry are "Thorneycroft's Insects"—I do not know why ; the squadron of the Imperial Light Horse is "The Imperial Light Looters ;" some of the South African Light Horse, who have just arrived with bunches of cocks' feathers in their hats, were received with friendly rapture at once as "The Pipe-cleaners ;" but none of these names need be taken to bear a too serious relation to facts, or to be detrimental to their possessors. Natal has indeed given of her best. What could be better than the Natal Carbineers—the oldest of

Natal volunteer bodies? Who does not know Major McKenzie, counted the best horseman in Natal, best of friends, greatest of dare-devils, than whom no one has a quicker temper, unless it be his well-known brother. Both are among the first polo-players of Natal. Was it not the Major who made himself for ever admired by asking an opponent who crossed him at polo to step down there and then and fight?

Like the Natal Field Artillery, with their pop-guns, all these forces are handicapped, only less so, by their weapons; they carry the Martini-Metford, which came in evolution between the Lee-Metford and the present Lee-Enfield. And as somebody has asked with ironical indignation, "Was not the Martini-Metford discarded weeks ago?" But the army wants more of these mounted forces. Incessantly to raid with cavalry and mounted infantry is one of the secrets, I am convinced, of fighting the Boers. Think of what Wheeler did in the American Civil War with his Confederate cavalry, raiding towns sometimes forty miles in the enemy's rear, stinging Sherman constantly if not always wounding him, and himself scarcely

ever losing a man. Never to leave the enemy alone, to cut off three men this day and two the next, to deal a succession of small blows—this is the plan of Colonel Baden-Powell, and he is one of the men (you can count them on your fingers) who have made their reputations in South Africa.

Captain Cayzer, by a far and risky journey to the east of Frere, has got on to a hill where he opened communication by heliograph with Ladysmith. Now we know that the besieged are able to read our flash-light signals at night. Every night, and nearly all night, the shaft of vivid light shoots up into the clouds and rebounds as quickly into the box from which it came. So it goes on flickering forth and flickering back, and what it all means, goodness knows! Only this we know, that at the end of this calm we advance to relieve Ladysmith. The Boers wait for us on the hills across the Tugela.

CHAPTER VII

THE EVE OF THE FIRST ASSAULT

FRERE, *Tuesday, December 12th, 1899.*

WE shall leave behind us here a piece of country that will bear marks of our encampment for years. Here are brought together 20,000 men; here is one of the largest British camps ever formed abroad, and it is only a unit of the whole; it is larger by 6,000 men than the whole of the Natal Field Force as it was originally imagined by the War Office. This great increase is the decree of the enemy's strategy, and by this camp we pay that strategy a concrete compliment. The column that will advance to the relief of Ladysmith is composed as follows:—

Infantry.—General Hart's Brigade (the Irish Brigade): The Inniskilling Fusiliers, Dublin Fusiliers, Connaught Rangers, the Border Regi-

ment. General Hildyard's Brigade (the English Brigade): The Devons, West Yorkshire, Queen's, East Surrey. General Lyttelton's Brigade (the Light Brigade): 3rd Battalion 60th Rifles, 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade, Durham Light Infantry, Scottish Rifles. General Barton's Brigade (the Fusilier Brigade): The 7th Royal Fusiliers, Scots Fusiliers, Irish Fusiliers, Welsh Fusiliers.

Cavalry.—The 1st Royal Dragoons, the 13th Hussars.

Mounted Infantry.—One squadron Imperial Light Horse, Bethune's M.I., Thorneycroft's M.I., Natal Carbineers, Natal Police, Combined Mounted Company of 60th Rifles and Dublin Fusiliers, three squadrons South African Light Horse.

Artillery.—The 7th, 14th, and 66th R.A. Batteries (A brigade division) and the 64th and 73rd Batteries; the Naval Brigade of 250 men, including officers, with two 4·7 guns and fourteen twelve-pounders.

Corps troops.

While we stay here the routine of field service is fulfilled and little else. Every day the sharp little eyes of the heliograph wink into the sleepy camp

from the surrounding hills. The signallers have a diverting time, as they are never quite sure whether they are going to embark upon a conversation with friends or with Boers. "T.A.F.," begins the Boer when he has hooked one of our signallers with the invitations of his heliograph. No one appears quite to know what "T.A.F." means, but it seems to be the Boers' sign for the beginning of a message. It is the "Are you there?" of the telephone. In any case when a heliograph begins with "T.A.F." it is certain that a Boer is at the other end of the flashes.

The Boer is not in the least embarrassed when he finds that he has not hooked a friend; his message often goes on in English, but without the stops which our signallers use, so that it is never as deceptive as it is meant to be.

"Who are you?" asked a British signaller the other day when he thought he had a Boer signalling to him.

"I belong to the Durham Light Infantry," was the answer.

"What is the number of the regiment?" asked the suspicious signaller.

The Boer did not know that, but with engaging

effrontery said instead that he was a corporal in the 9th Hussars. Then he was switched off, so to speak.

Another time when one of our signallers found himself speaking to a Boer, "How is Joubert?" he asked.

"Go to the devil!" was the answer; and the reply to that was, "All right, but you'll be there first."

Or, again, a Boer signalled to us, "Send assistance to General White at once"—advice which will not be neglected.

Captain Cayzer has done well twice to open communication with Ladysmith by means of an intermediate hill. The first time he was soon hunted home by the Boers, but the next he has stayed longer. In Frere, as in Estcourt, we are hidden from Ladysmith by a high ridge, but from his mountain east of Frere Cayzer can look down the valley in which Ladysmith lies. Our signallers watch the mountain earnestly, and occasionally are rewarded with news from Ladysmith—news that suddenly sparkles on the side of the dark mountain like a diamond on velvet.

By a tacit understanding Sunday is nearly always

allowed to be a day of rest, free even from affairs of outposts. Then church parades are held through all the camp. Tommy sings heartily if he can get so much as the fifth share in the hymn-book, but it is rather to be feared that when he sings the militant hymns which are always held appropriate to these occasions, when he shouts "Onward, Christians, onward go," and "Fight the fight, maintain the strife," he is thinking less in figures of speech than of going onward to Ladysmith.

On Sunday, as well as on every other day in the week, every man who is a free agent and respects himself visits the popular conical hill from which the best view of the enemy's position is to be had. The hill-top is always crowded ; many of us have our favourite seats—front seats—among the boulders, from which we look over the country across which we must soon advance. Some one has suggested that we should attach our cards to our places and reserve them. It is a fascinating but not highly encouraging occupation to sit there and study the almost insuperably strong Boer position—ridge upon ridge behind the river Tugela, a position which bears on its face, as on a phylactery, the golden texts of Boer strategy.

There is not a kopje there but, if it be taken by an enemy, can be made immediately untenable from the kopje behind it.

The following conversation may be taken as occurring any day between sunrise and sunset on the conical hill :—

Scene. A picket, with officers scattered among the boulders ; many officers not on duty ; a few correspondents ; a naval officer with a large telescope on a tripod ; a staff of heliographists with a heliograph. All the officers are looking through glasses across the plain to the ridges behind Colenso. The men of the picket are looking in the same direction, and have looked for hours, without glasses, and can see nothing. Their conversation is proportionately vague. Enter newly arrived and distinguished staff officer, on hill for the first time.

Staff Officer. Now where are all these Boers ?

Captain with Picket. I'll show you, sir. (*All present put up their glasses.*) The biggest camp is under Grobler's Kloof among those trees.

S.O. (after looking laboriously). I don't see it.

Captain. They're pretty well hidden, sir ; they're devils for hiding themselves.

S.O. What's the good of my looking if they're hidden?

Captain. Well, you can see some tents, of course, sir.

S.O. Near that black patch beyond the sunlight, eh?

Captain (politely, having realised that S.O. is looking in an entirely wrong direction). You see this kraal?

S.O. The far one?

Captain. No; just below this hill?

S.O. Yes.

Captain. Very well. Look right over that, and you see a white road winding up to the left. Got that, sir?

S.O. Yes.

Captain. Well, look a little beyond that, rather to the left, and you see two trees.

S.O. Yes.

Captain. Look over the left tree, and you'll see a reddish low hill.

S.O. Yes.

Captain (triumphantly). Well, there's the camp to the left of it. Quite plain. I can see with my naked eye now. (*S.O. is silent. Both realise*

that, after all, they are looking at quite different objects.)

S.O. I believe they've bolted.

Naval Officer. There are certainly fewer camps than there were.

Voice of Private (overheard in undertone). Well, I ain't seen nothing. 'Ope they 'aven't gone. We'll 'ammer you, Kroojer, my son.

Subaltern of Picket (suddenly). By gad! Who are these coming across the plain? Boers?

Bystanders. Oh, the Boers wouldn't come across here.

Subaltern. They were in that kraal over there yesterday, anyhow. *(All watch the advancing horsemen intently. Some with inferior field-glasses say, "They're only cattle.")*

Naval Officer (decisively). It's some of our scouts coming in. *(Attention gradually relaxes.)*

S.O. *(who does not yet understand South African atmosphere).* I see some tents now. Anybody seen those yet? On that flat-topped hill, about eight miles away, just behind Colenso.

A Bystander. Oh, that's Umbulwana, just above Ladysmith—twenty miles away.

S.O. Oh, no. Really! *(A low rumble is heard.)*

All. That's a gun. Ladysmith is getting it hot this morning.

A Correspondent. By Jove! Look at the smoke!

Another Correspondent. My dear chap, that's a grass fire.

Officer with Heliograph (suddenly). There they are! Now, then! (*One of the heliograph staff snatches out note-book. A brilliant winking light is seen on hill many miles east.*) Good old Cayzer! Tell me when he drops.

Man with Book. Yes, sir. (*A pause.*) Dropped!

Officer. Well; what's he doing now?

Man with Book. Calling for light, sir.

Officer. Bad luck! He's lost it. (*Signalling soon continues. Heliograph with flashing glasses clicks like a telegraphing instrument.*)

A Subaltern (to another subaltern). Can you read it?

The Other Subaltern. No. It's all in code, anyhow.

First Subaltern. Yes, I suppose so.

Second Subaltern. Got any water?

F.S. (handing a bottle). It's hot.

S.S. Righto! Doesn't matter.

F.S. Just feel that stone.

S.S. (*putting his hand on brown boulder and instantly drawing it away.*) By Jove!

(All left looking across the plain, which shivers in the heat. Picket, heliographists, visitors, all are gradually replaced by others ; but conversation on hill-top still continues in similar strain.)

Frere Camp is ready to move. The men are more than ready ; only the horses which have arrived lately need further to relax their stiff joints. After the journey from Durban most of them want at least two days to recover from that nightmare of terror. Think of a horse carefully packed into a box in an English railway train, and then think of these horses put shoulder to shoulder into open trucks, looking over the sides as though they were in an open boat, terrified by the noise and the visible motion. An officer told me of the night he spent in a horse truck. He told me how it took five hours to travel four miles ; how the horses leaped with fear till some of them had their forelegs over the sides of the trucks ; how he had to get them back by levering them up with poles ; how when the train slowed or stopped the whole weight of the jammed horses, which was checked by no cross-pieces, was thrown

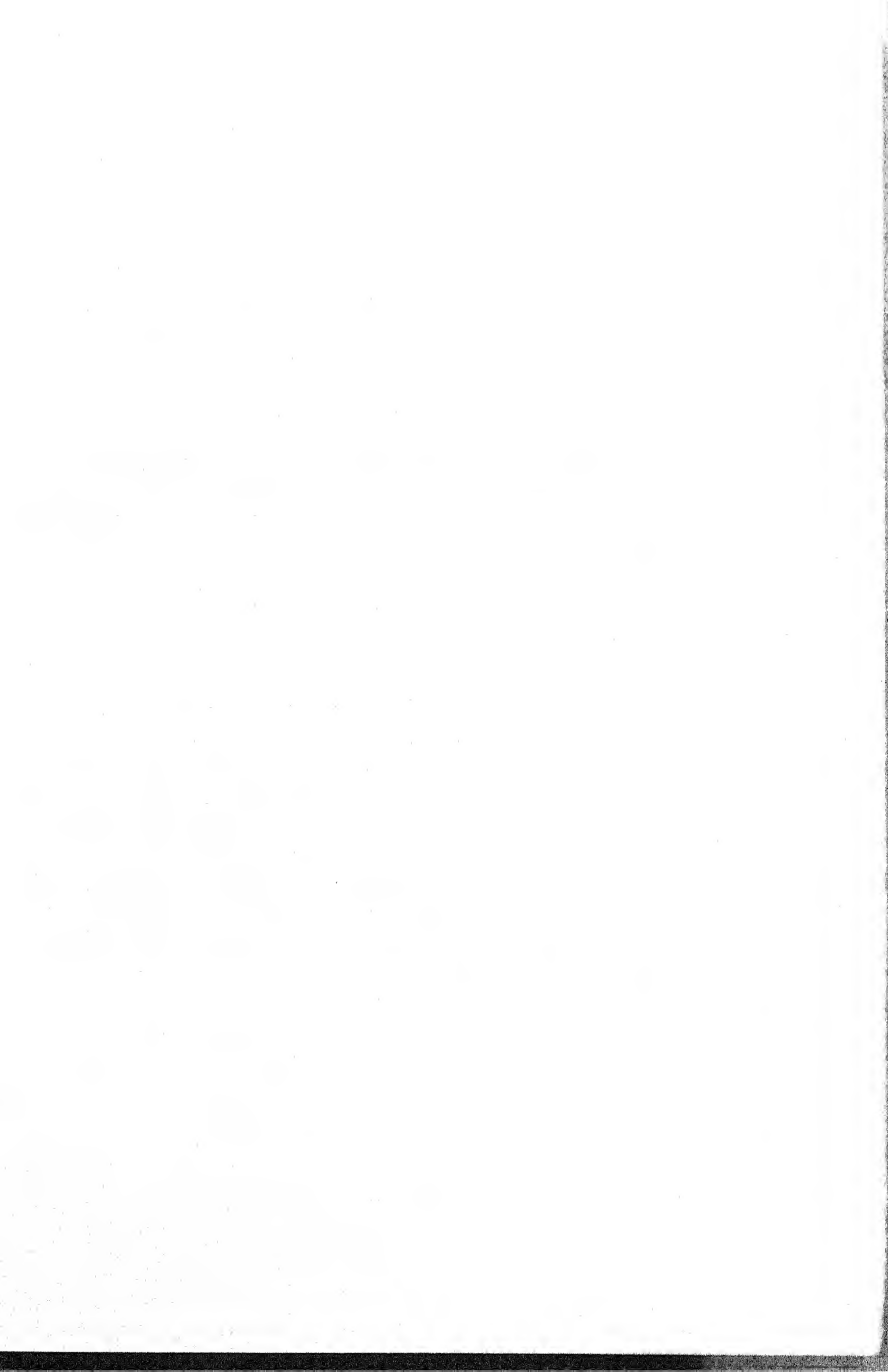
against the end of the truck so that he thought it must inevitably give way ; and how, for himself, he expected that he might be at any moment down among a violent sea of hoofs and legs and rolling bodies.

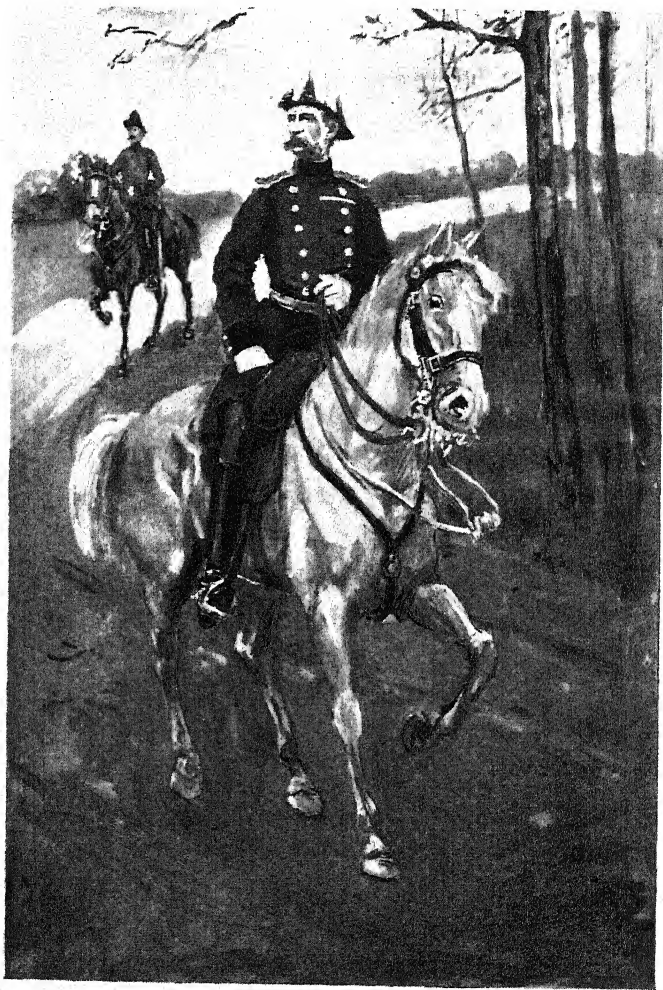
Unfortunately the downs about Frere, which lies in a belt of country too little watered even in the rainy season, holds little nourishment for horses. Mules do far better ; oxen eat anything with contentment ; but the more fastidious horses often turn aside with disgust even from the imported American hay, which is not exactly suited to their palate. To the correspondent the need to choose animals for transport is a serious burden. The horse that strays a little way from the tent is the easy prey of the camp looter. Mules have this advantage, that they cannot stray far when they are tied together ; tie four mules together, and when they gallop they stand still, for no committee of four mules ever agreed upon a direction. They travel quickest when they sink their differences in hunger and simply eat their way forward in a steady row ; thus they will travel perhaps half a mile in five hours. All this is in favour of the mule ; but then

he who undertook to drive a team of mules in harness would be something more than a correspondent. For myself, I have decided that my baggage shall go in a Scotch cart drawn by two oxen. I have lost my oxen only twice; once when I turned them loose to feed too near their old home, whither they returned precipitately like the leal true cat, and once in a thunderstorm at night.

It is gratifying to find that among horses the best looking are the 'bus horses of London which were chosen to join the artillery teams. Can you help looking with grateful and affectionate eyes on the animal which once drew you in the tardy 'bus from Liverpool Street to the Bank? Those times, industrious 'bus horse, were the hardship which was needed to make you endure better than others the cramping sea journey, and now the heat, the dust, and the arduous hauling! Some of the 'bus horses took the sea journey as though it were a rest ordered by the veterinary surgeon for their health, and now in resplendent strength they jib and caper. "Stamp the board, George!" said an artilleryman to his fellow-driver the other day when a 'bus horse was upsetting the

whole team; and the report upon which I rely says that after the driver had ejaculated "Right be'ind!" the horse helped to draw the gun for nothing all the way.





MAJOR-GENERAL SIR FRANCIS CLERY, K.C.B.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE OF COLENSO

CHIEVELEY, *Tuesday, December 19th, 1899.*

THE greater part of the Ladysmith relief column marched obscurely away from Frere on Thursday, December 14th, in the first light of the morning, and in a strange mixture of smoke, dust, and mist. As the light thickened, black patches, still smoking, showed where the refuse of the great camp had been burned, and the acres of camping ground, empty of tents and soldiers and waggons, were a void as sensible to the eye as though a tooth had been drawn from the face of nature. Two days before, an advance camp had been formed beyond Chieveley by the Fusilier Brigade (under General Barton) and a few guns, and the movement of December 14th brought it about that the whole column lay on those dry downs which slope to the Tugela river.

On Wednesday and Thursday, the naval guns in their new position bombarded the hills held by the Boers near Colenso. The lyddite shells burst long aching gaps in the Boer trenches, but no suspicion of answer came from the enemy. The Boers had contrived a conspiracy of invisibility; I myself did not see more than thirty move away from the trenches, and men began to say that the few tents that could be seen were false camps, that the Boers were behind the hills, or indeed had retired altogether, and that we should cross the river without opposition.

Before daylight on Friday, December 15th, I woke to the sound of men and horses tramping and the cries of the native drivers to their mules. There was not a spark of light in the sky till half the mounted brigade had wound past my tent in a walking column; here and there a pipe or cigarette glowed in the column; the men were silent, or if they spoke rallied one another on the expectations of the day; the horses, in the grasp of the prevalent sickness, threw their heads down from time to time and coughed. But, take it for all in all, the camp was filled with a steady, continuous, sweeping noise which resembled silence.

This was the morning of a battle. Look where you would, you were conscious darkly that the field moved before your eyes; troops in masses, still too vague for recognition, coiled and uncoiled till the light fell on an army that had resolved itself into its disposition. The dust from the arid downs floated up in an ethereal powder, and the column at my tent door passed through it like men wading through a white level tide which reached the middle of men and the bellies of horses.

I cannot help remembering an incident which happened as that column wound past my tent, perhaps because it was one of these incidents which are trifling enough to seize the mind peremptorily on grand occasions. A Zulu driver lashed out with his long whip at his mules, and instantly let drop from his left hand, with a curious native cry of despair, that cherished Kaffir instrument, a concertina. The moving column moved on; "nor all the piety nor wit" of the Zulu could lure it back to recover the concertina. But the leader of the mounted company coming behind noticed the instrument lying on the ground. "Mind that concertina!" he shouted. "Pass the

word!" He pulled his horse aside, the word was passed, a line of horses in the middle of the company swerved, the forest of legs passed, and, behold, the concertina lay untouched. The next company leader threw up his hand like a driver in the Strand. "Look out; mind the concertina!" "Mind the wind-jammer," said one man to another in tones (as they seemed) of deep personal resentment if a rider let his horse's hoofs go dangerously near the precious thing. And thus all the rest of the brigade passed, hurrying on to use all the latest and most civilised means for killing men and destroying property, and minding the concertina tenderly as they went; so that when all the dancing sea of legs had passed over it the concertina still lay unscratched on the ground, and I picked it up and took it into my tent.

Daylight revealed the army, disposed and beautifully ordered, at the top of the plain which falls gently to the Tugela. Beyond the river the hills, as we were the closer, looked the more desperate to take—ridge upon ridge, top upon top, each one looking over the head of the one in front of it—simply desperate! Try to imagine the battlefield. At the end of the plain, where it fell

away and disappeared, the high-banked river ran across our front, roughly, in a straight line, and where the river ran was the foot of the hills. Down the plain about the middle, but rather to the east, ran the railway. East of the railway is a great hill, near the river but on this side, called Hlangwana Mountain; and the plain is edged with a ridge which droops away southward like a tail from the mountain. The railway dives straight down the plain to its bridge, or to the place where the bridge used to be before the Boers blew it up, near Colenso; and near the railway bridge was the footbridge, charged with explosives no doubt, but still whole on the day of the battle. On the other side of the river is a cluster of red-brown ridges behind the village, the smallest and nearest to the river bearing on its end Fort Wylie. All these ridges were entrenched, the trenches almost replicas, you might say, of the ridges themselves, trench coming upon trench till the sides of the ridges were potato fields for furrows. Behind this little but important cluster kopjes rise progressively in height and multiply in complexity (some conical, some flat-topped) till they culminate in long flat-backboned Umbulwana, which frowns

above invisible Ladysmith. West of the Fort Wylie cluster of ridges, and only a little further back from the river, is a chain of fairly high hills which possess their own sky-line, and of these the most prominent in feature is Grobler's Kloof Hill. Below Grobler's the river makes a loop, of which the bunt, as it were, is to the north; the plain within the loop was therefore on the British or south side of the river, and the troops who marched into the bunt of the loop were exposed to fire from three directions. On our side of the river there was one billow of ground which alone threatened to rob the plain of its title. On the southern end of this high ground the naval battery was placed, and the rest of the billow swelled down to the river so as to make the left wing of our army invisible from the right. So much for the scene of action.

The army was drawn up like this. Lord Dundonald with the Mounted Brigade was on the right, a long way on the east side of the railway, with the 7th Battery R.A. supporting him; next came General Barton's Fusilier Brigade, also on the far side of the railway; next the 14th and 66th Batteries R.A. and six naval guns, again on

the far side of the railway; next General Hildyard's Brigade, which when it advanced bisected itself with the railway; next the battery of naval guns, on the billow of ground; next General Lyttelton's Brigade, where the billow sloped to the left; next the 64th and 73rd Batteries R.A.; next, on the flat ground, General Hart's Brigade; and, finally, on the extreme left, a little cavalry—the Royals and the 13th Hussars.

"I force the passage of the Tugela to-morrow," Sir Francis Clery had said in his orders the night before; the operations of Friday, December 15th, were therefore plainly intended to be an attack, and not a reconnaissance in force. It is probable that very early in the day, when Sir Redvers Buller—remember that Sir Redvers Buller was present and in command, but officially he had superseded no one—when Sir Redvers Buller, I say, found that the Boers displayed no weak point in their ineffably strong hills, he might have changed the plan into a reconnaissance in force, and, having simply drawn the enemy's fire at last and counted their guns, might have fallen back with comparatively little loss. But he was prevented from doing this almost entirely by the

tragic pickle into which the 14th and 66th Batteries fell. This tragedy was the pivot on which the battle turned, and I must explain it fully later.

Attack, then, there was to be, and the plan of attack as given in the orders was this. General Hart was to cross the Tugela at Bridle Drift, the top of the loop I have described, and, having crossed, was to march along the north bank to the iron footbridge. General Hildyard was to march straight for the bridge and cross it. General Lyttelton was to support these two brigades. General Barton was to help Lord Dundonald in the attack on Hlangwana Mountain, on this side of the river. The whole scheme was a frontal attack without disguise. Why was this plan made? Well, first, any other plan would have been almost equally difficult, for the Boers held the hills all along the line, and had fortified the few drifts where a turning movement might have been made; secondly, the Generals believed, on evidence that there was every reason to think trustworthy, that the hills across the river were rather weakly held; and, thirdly, that belief was supported by the fact that for two days there had been no



answer, or trace of answer, to the heavy firing of our naval guns.

I found the infantry sitting in rows in the order of advance—dotted yellow rows on yellow ground, each man the appointed distance from his neighbour, and each row the appointed distance from the next. The first row was far down the plain, a set of mere pin-heads ; nearer the rows were like vegetables turned out of a hoed furrow and laid along the ground ; and close about me they were full-sized men, chaffing and smoking and propping themselves up on their elbows to inquire when the “fun” was going to begin.

The fun began in earnest a few minutes before six o'clock ; lyddite, lyddite, lyddite was poured from the Naval Battery on to the Boer ridges—first the tremendous crash of the 40-pounder, then the rise high into the air of the red-brown dust, ploughed up by the tail of the gun at the frantic recoil ; the cry of the shell through the air ; the upheaval of smoke and earth and dust, like the explosion of a submarine mine, where the shell burst on the brown hills ; the gasped, excited compliments to the gunner ; the report of the explosion flung back to you, followed by the long

rolling reverberation given up by the hills ; the shorter, more snappy crash of the 12-pounders, the pall of dust and smoke (red and grey) drooping over the ridges ; Fort Wylie knocked askew, and showing only now and again, as through a cloud bank, the wreaths of shrapnel smoke in the air at a higher level ; the deafness and buzzing in your ears—these are things that clamp your soul and will be the visions afterwards of wakeful nights.

The pin-heads of infantry stood up and advanced further down the plain, and the rows behind them also stood up and advanced into the places which just before had been occupied by the pin-heads. All the time the crash and scream of the bombardment continued, and never so much as a single shell or a puff of rifle smoke came from the Boers. Had they thought it worth while to hold the hills against this ransacking, awful bombardment ? Was not our advance, after all, to be an Aldershot field-day ? On our left one might, until now, have supposed so.

Ah ! what was that crackling and rattling away down on our left ? Was it possible that the close-quarter fighting was beginning already ? The gunners seemed barely to have begun their

deadly work, and yet this new sound, swelling into a steady continuity, could mean only one thing. General Hart had, indeed, marched his men down to within a few hundred yards of the river in quarter-column formation, and there the main body of them halted, offering a solid target to the Boer artillery. Hart had brought his brigade into action much sooner than any one had expected and before the artillery had prepared the way for their advance with shell fire. And we learned later that the advance had been misdirected as well as mistimed; the brigade struck the river not at Bridle Drift, as had been intended, but at another point altogether.

The Dublin Fusiliers, however, who were the first line and were to hold the river bank while the crossing was made at Bridle Drift, opened into extended order, and marched for the place where the river makes a loop. Then suddenly, and for the first time, a flash on the opposite hills—not the flash of a shell bursting but of a Boer gun—phew-w-w-w-w, whistling and throbbing came the projectile, and dump, down among the extended lines. Whoever those artillerists were, Germans or not, they knew how to train a gun.

And now all along the Boer lines the guns were licking out their vicious little adders' tongues of fire. So there were guns, after all—ten, as far as I could make out—and the air on our side of the river was whistling and throbbing, and sometimes was filled with the horrible whine of bursting shrapnel, all of which are very different sounds from the cry of a shell which is departing from you. What consummate coolness and judgment that defending party had, to lie quiet for two days and part of a morning under lyddite, and to open now—now! Well, in spite of experience and statistics, one can never remember (while the thunder of artillery is in one's ears) how strangely small is the number of casualties from shell-fire; I, at least, could hardly imagine a Boer gunner standing steadily to his gun under that bombardment.

The Dublins disappeared down on to the plain in the loop of the river, and I must continue my narrative from the evidence of others, as they were hidden from me by the billow of ground on the large plain. I was watching the advance in the middle.

Hart's brigade had begun the morning with a

kind of brigade drill, and the spirit of it clung to them. Behind the Dublins came the Connaught Rangers in quarter columns massed, and one Boer shell after another was dropped on to the excellent target before the unfortunate fellows were dispersed. As for the Dublins, conspicuous and entirely unsheltered, like every one else on this unequal day, they were fired on from three directions—musketry on either side, and a couple of guns as well as musketry on their front. Unfortunate and gallant regiment; it was for this that the diminished battalion had just been brought up to fighting strength, to lose 216 men! The Connaughts lost only less severely, a regiment, like the Dublins, as hard to restrain in the field as in the camp.

On came the Inniskilling Fusiliers and the Border Regiment to the support of both, and the 64th and 73rd Batteries were firing away in their rear, but nothing could save them from the flanking fires and the guns in front, which had fairly gripped their position. At last the river bank was reached—reached by those who were left. Where was the ford? Where were the Boers? Never mind the ford—the Boers, as was discovered later, had dammed the river, and the ford no longer

existed; some plunged into the deep water, nearly 170 rounds of cartridges were on their bodies, barbed wire beneath the water may or may not have dragged them down—I cannot entirely trust the evidence—but most of them drowned like dogs with weights tied to them. A few reached the other bank. Where was the Boer fire coming from now? What a conspiracy of invisibility, whether the enemy were passive or active!

A man of the Dublins—he had been one of the first up the hill at Talana, and his was a name cherished for bravery even among the Dublins—was looking after some wounded comrades on the river bank. Finding himself alone, he thought only of getting back to his regiment—was not that the firing line?—and, like a good fellow, he put his helmet on the back of his head and, as the soldier says, “legged it.” He was seen running back, and was arrested when he reached his lines—to be tried for cowardice. Ah, but the thing was hopeless; more ammunition was needed even before the retirement set in; two natives in charge of it turned to run away at the supreme moment, and a private of the Dublins shot them dead. The

need to retire was none the less ; back came the lines, not less conspicuous in retreat than in advance, with the shrapnel and bullets about their ears from the invisible enemy to the last syllable of the retirement.

Some of those who had crossed the river never heard of the retirement and were made prisoners. The Colonel of the Inniskillings fell in with some Boers on the other side. They do not appear to have offered to take him, though he was unwounded and surrounded. "Stop your men firing," one of them said in effect. "How can I do that?" the Colonel is said to have asked. "Well, undertake to do it and I'll walk away," said the Boer, as I have it ; and with that he and his men did walk away.

There were other similar cases. Barton, of the Connaughts, for example, went twice to the river to bring water for the wounded after the retirement had begun. At the second visit he met some Boers, and he was unarmed. "Are you a combatant?" they asked. "I *was*," said he. And then, after a conversation, he suddenly realised that he was alone and free, but—strange difference and incredible discomfiture !—committed somehow

by the conversation ; in short, on his parole not to fight against the Boers again in this whole campaign ! To save his honour among his friends by dishonour would have been easy to a less scrupulous man. He preserved his honour by risking it. He confessed that he was on his word. And so one who is known as a keen soldier goes to the rear with a little incident in his life that approaches the mysterious, that happened almost inexplicably to himself, an incident that occupied but a few moments in the bewildering hours of a battle, and yet is irrevocable. A captain in the Dublins argued with another party of Boers and afterwards came back to our lines. Another singular experience was that which befell Colonel Bullock, of the Devons. He, with about forty of his men, was cut off by the Boers among some trees near the river. When called upon to surrender he refused ; and some of his men fired, killing three Boers. The Boers certainly behaved with great restraint. They merely advanced and repeated their demand. And when Colonel Bullock refused again, a Boer simply clubbed him over the head with the butt-end of a rifle. When Bullock fell the whole party were made prisoners. Curious fellows these Boers !

Enough has been said of the fight on the left. Our guns had come into action a little too late, if they would have made any difference in fighting an invisible enemy. Hart was repulsed. He had lost 523 men.

It would be accurate to say that three battles were going on at once. While General Hart was fighting on the left, General Hildyard pressed forward to the bridge in the middle, and General Barton and the Mounted Brigade under Lord Dundonald had their own fight against Hlangwana Mountain, far away on the other side of the railway. The story of the middle is the story of the 14th and 66th Batteries R.A. and six naval guns.

Colonel Long, as I know, for I travelled from England with him, had a theory, which was this—that you must get near to the enemy with your guns. “The only way,” he used to say, “to smash those beggars is to rush in at ’em.” I was not at Omdurman, where he commanded the artillery, but I know that at Colenso he had every opportunity to employ his theory. He chose to go with the 14th and 66th Batteries, perhaps because on the east side of the railway he had the best opportunity of getting near the enemy. A long way down the

plain he halted and began to fire at Fort Wylie ; but he was not near enough to fulfil the theory, and so Colonel Hunt, who commanded these two batteries, was ordered to limber up, and on the guns went. Colonel Long went with them. This time they halted about five hundred yards from a shelter trench on the south side of the river.

Probably the trench was not visible to the batteries, but I could see it easily from my position below the naval battery. This was filled with Boers ; beyond the trench was a hedge of trees, also filled with Boers ; and beyond that the river banks—those also filled with Boers. Colonel Long was still unlimbering in his new position when—bang ! —it was like the signal for a firework display to begin—a shell came down among the guns, and on the signal the air was instantly whipping and singing with bullets all round the gunners. Men and horses fell down just where they stood ; the shells were nothing, but the air and ground were furious with bullets.

British artillery has never been in a hotter place ; if there can be such a thing as an ambuscade in the middle of a pitched battle, these batteries had run into one. For nearly half an hour

the guns were served by men and officers, who seemed to melt down into the ground under some deadly sirocco, and at the end of the half-hour there was silence there—at least on our part; nearly every officer was wounded, the horses lay round dead in heaps. Behind the guns there was a donga, and three hundred yards behind that another donga. Most of the naval guns were to the right of the second donga, commanded by Lieutenant Ogilvy, of the *Terrible*. He himself has told me how the bullets cut right through horses and ammunition waggons; they were bullets at close quarters, in the full strength of life, bullets that splashed and drummed and spattered on the guns and limbers. “Last night it rained rather heavily,” he said in talking to me, “and the first few heavy drops on my tent—by gad! I had the whole scene over again. It was that exactly.” One of the naval twelve-pounders upset in the donga, but the loss among the navy men was astonishingly small. Remember, however, that the naval gunner studs his guns about irregularly, wherever he sees good positions, and holds in contempt the plan of the army gunner, who puts his guns in a beautiful symmetrical line, the guns at regular intervals, and all close together.

When the general retirement was ordered, one of these hearty naval souls thought, on reflection, that retirement was not for him. He slipped away, picked up a rifle, and filled his pouches with ammunition. He trudged along towards the river, and at last selected a spot which satisfied his modest requirements—a little comfort and reasonable shelter. His officer did not see him again until nightfall, when he came into camp tired, hot, very footsore, hungry, and thirsty. He had fired away all his pouches of ammunition and then had trudged home alone, long after the retirement was over. "I haven't had such a good day," he said with simple feeling, as he dropped worn out to the ground, "not for a very long while."

Colonel Long, shot through the liver, Colonel Hunt, also wounded, and their officers, nearly all wounded, had fallen back to the donga behind their guns. The guns stood alone, and seemed to us all to be abandoned. Colonel Long apparently had no such thought. It seems inevitable that he should receive the greater part of the blame for the result of the battle; it will be said that he precipitated and protracted the fight and prevented it from being turned, at worst, into a costly reconnais-

sance. It is just, therefore, that his own statement should be considered. No one, I imagine, will argue that the theory of getting near enough was proved in this case to be anything but a gloomy failure. Colonel Long himself allows that. But listen to the rest. He says that when he fell back to the donga he did so because he was ordered; that he retired to wait for reinforcements and ammunition, expecting them to come every moment; that his retirement was plainly not a panic, because all the wounded were brought carefully to the donga; that he expected the main advance on the Tugela to overtake him any moment, when he would be able to re-man his guns, and that was the reason why he left them standing ready for use with their breech-blocks still in them. Poor Long lay in the donga for hours. "Don't hurry about me," he kept saying; "there are lots worse." He had to wait, in any case, for there was no doctor in the donga. At last Captain Herbert brought Sir Francis Clery's staff doctor, who came readily under the heavy fire and helped the wounded. His was only one instance that day of the eager devotion of doctors. Anywhere among the shell fire you could see

them kneeling and performing little quick operations that required deftness and steadiness of hand, and I question if there is in this world a more exquisite combination of tenderness and courage than in the doctor who does his bare duty on the battlefield.

On November 15th Colonel Long was in command at Estcourt, and was held responsible for the disaster to the armoured train. I believe he had ordered the officer commanding the train not to go beyond Frere (it was just beyond Frere that the accident happened); but he had given the order verbally, not in writing, for want of time, and so he accepted the responsibility. On the same day of the next month he is held responsible for half the trouble at Colenso. He may be responsible, but he is a good soldier and a gentleman if ever there was one.

I must leave Colonel Long and return to the guns standing there and inviting rescue. General Hildyard's infantry advanced to the support of the unhappy guns which were unable to support them—a strange but necessary inversion. I shall never forget the advance of the Devons and the Queen's and the Scots Fusiliers (who had

bored across the plain diagonally from Barton's Brigade) over the plain on the right of the railway to the river. Line after line suddenly rose up and ran forward; some reached a shelter trench (a better trench than our engineers could build, as everybody swears), and dropped into it, others passed on beyond that and disappeared over the steep edge of the river. The shells were bursting in the four corners of the advance, but the infantrymen do not look to the right or to the left; they simply do not mind them; they walk straight through the dust of them at the same pace, with eyes to the front. You never saw such a wonderful thing in your life. Here and there you could clearly see a man drop, and the line rolled on without him, and the next straight as a ruler, like the one before it and the one behind it, passed over him too and was gone like a wave, leaving, as is the way of waves, something in its track. I remember watching the smoke and dust from one shell drift slowly away, and when it was gone three men were on the ground. One rose up and walked away. The second rose up and sat down carefully on a rock; then he got up from that and put his hands on his hips, and leaned forward as

though examining something in the grass, and then slowly toppled forward; two bearers and a doctor were standing over him five minutes afterwards. And the third man lay on the ground quite still, and I do not think he ever moved again.

Now what was to happen to those twelve guns still standing there without their friends? A litter of abandoned things was about them, and horses galloped near in circles in a sort of playful frenzy which puzzled me till I found that they were all riderless and were dragging their dead still harnessed to them. The infantry had now clashed with the Boer riflemen all along the line of three miles and more, and the rattle was a memorable confusion of sounds like the rolling of kettledrums and the clapping of hands all brought up to a far higher power. Sometimes the din dwindled almost to silence—you might have thought the battle over—and then as a new line of our infantry appeared and menaced the line of the river the noise would rise again from a few startled pops through a crescendo of crackling to a sweeping babel of sound.

It was during this advance of the Devons and the Queen's that the series of brilliant attempts

to rescue the guns began. A little earlier—about ten o'clock—Sir Redvers Buller had left the position he had appointed for himself at the naval battery—the situation in the centre was too serious for a man of Buller's spirit to stay away from it now—and had ridden off towards the guns with all his staff and the escort of the Natal Police. "Out of this, please," he said—he was down among the naval twelve-pounders behind Long's guns now. The Boers had perhaps recognised the staff; the whistling in the air trebled.

"You oughtn't to be here, sir," gasped Ogilvy.

"I'm all right, my boy," said the General.

The staff lingered about the place; Sir Redvers Buller was eating sandwiches, and from the scattered groups of men emerged one of the most gallant trios that ever tried to win the Victoria Cross. Off the three went for the guns—I saw them go—Schofield, Sir Redvers Buller's A.D.C.; Congreve, of the Rifle Brigade, who had been quietly giving me notes out of his pocket-book an hour before up near the naval battery; and young Roberts (Lord Roberts' son), of Sir Francis Clery's staff.

Roberts was looking over his shoulder at Schofield, laughing and working his stick with a circular

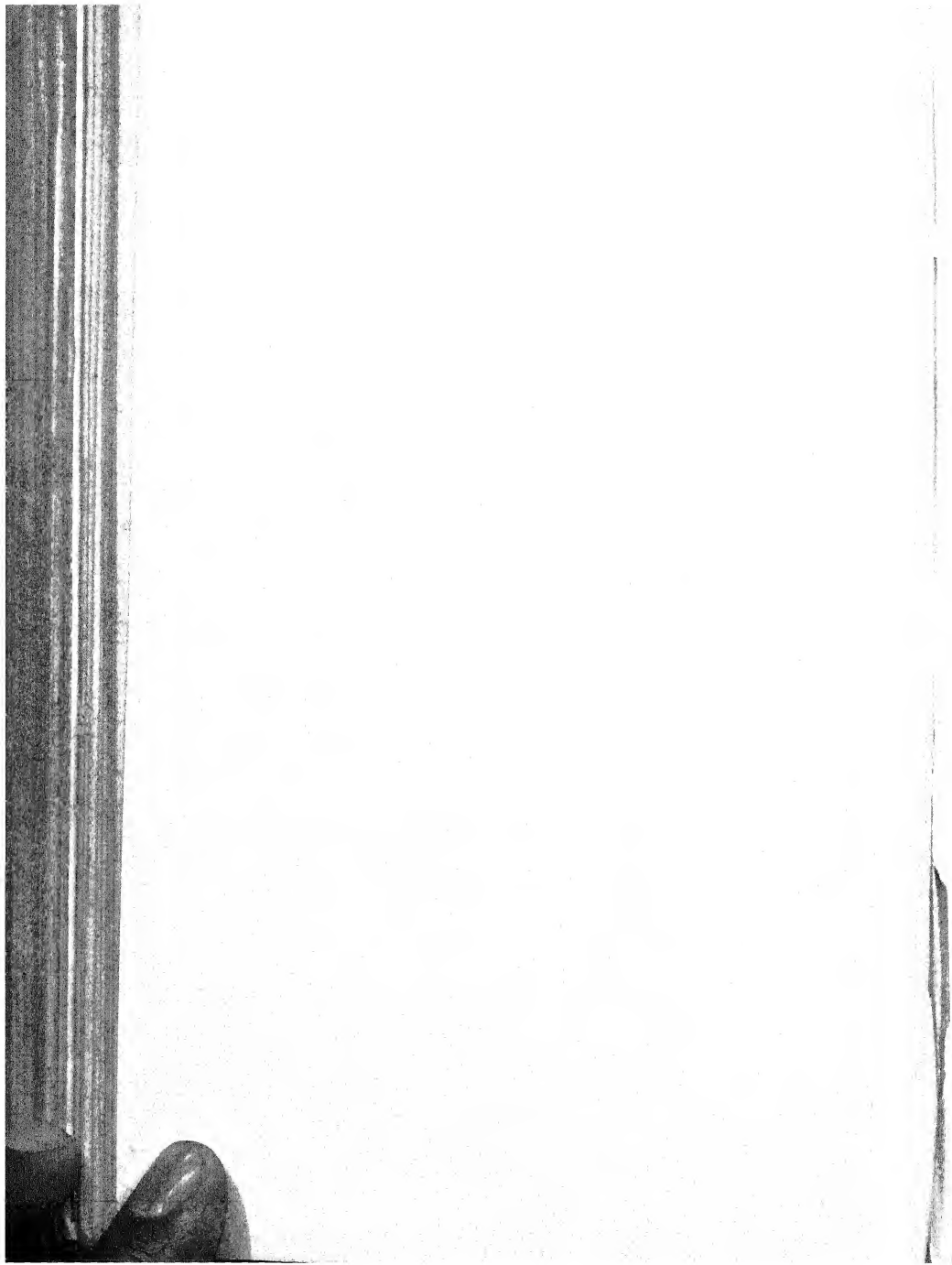
motion, like a jockey, to encourage his horse; he was in the full exhilaration, that is to say, of a man riding to hounds, when his first bullet found its billet. Poor Freddy Roberts! he was shot three times, and fell mortally wounded. He died on Sunday night, to every one's grief. He just faded gently away with a notoriously painful wound which gave him marvellously little pain, and his last moments would have been made golden to him if he had known that he had been granted a V.C. Like father, like son—but the son never knew it. The message reached Cape Town in time, but there it was delayed, and when it arrived at Chieveley, Roberts lay in another bed.

Roberts, as I have said, was shot three times and fell wounded mortally. Congreve was shot twice through the clothes, and his body was still untouched; then his riding-cane went, shot in halves as he held it in his hand, and finally he got one in the leg, and he too fell. Only Schofield remained—Schofield and the splendid fellows who were left on the horses; and he, with those men and such horses as were still alive, brought back two guns. Still ten guns out of the two batteries remained. Who would bring them in?



J. A. Stewart
1900

SAVING THE GUNS AT THE BATTLE OF COLENSO



The officer commanding the 7th Battery, near Hlangwana Mountain, sent off Reid, his senior captain, with a team of waggon horses and riders, to emulate the trio. Nearly every horse was shot. Reid returned to his own battery with a bullet in his thigh, and stayed there, covering the retreat of the mounted brigade, till half-past three in the afternoon. Then Lord Dundonald ordered him home, since advice to that effect had been useless. It had to be explained to Reid afterwards—what he had done. "Bosh!" he said. "It was the drivers."

Schofield was like Reid; the drivers, if you believed him, had done it all. It was not true, and yet what can be finer than to remember and admit that the basis of all individual distinction is the jeopardies and sacrifices of others; to remember that officers make themselves famous always a little by proxy. So long as our officers do remember and confess it, we need not fear that they live in an inhuman relationship with their men. None of Schofield's six drivers was hit, but three of the horses were, and yet they managed to stand up and pull the guns. If one horse had fallen the whole game would have been up—not a

gun of the two batteries could have been won back for us. "I can't believe it even now," Schofield told me afterwards, "that we got through so well." And then he went on, "I'll show you how cool those drivers were. When I was hooking on one of the guns one of the drivers said, 'Elevate the muzzle, sir'—that's a precaution for galloping in rough country. But I shouldn't have thought of it—not just then. Pretty cool, wasn't it?"

It was all no good; a general retirement was ordered, ten guns were left on the field, and it may be true that the Boers rolled them into the river.

Sir Redvers Buller and his staff came by me on their return. The General climbed down limply and wearily from his horse like an old, old man. I thought he was wounded with vexation; I did not know then that he was wounded—though slightly—with a bullet, which had passed round his ribs. The horse of Lord Gerard, one of his A.D.C.'s, had been shot in the neck; Captain Hughes, the doctor of his staff, had been killed—half blown to pieces—by a shell; one of the Natal Police (the General's escort) had had his horse grazed in the fetlock, in the belly, and in the

mouth, and two bullets had passed through his holsters. This is the sort of fire the General had been under, eating sandwiches.

Meanwhile the naval gunners had been bringing their twelve-pounders away. All their native drivers had fled, and the sailors fell to with their invincible jollity to man the bullock teams, kicking the animals with lusty good-will in the ribs to put them right, using with fervour the few Kaffir words they had among them. Twenty-eight oxen were lost, but the guns were all brought away. The sailors were pursued by their old friends the shells that had been playing on them all the morning; they recognised them all with kindly greeting—the three shells, for instance, that came regularly in a volley from the Vickers-Maxim, with the “pom-pom-pom” voice, like the sound of a post-man rapping on the door of an empty house, shells of such low velocity that the sailors had plenty of time to take cover after they had heard the report of the gun; then the segment shell, that moved so slowly and visibly in the air before it burst that they used to run out from behind the guns to field it like a cricket ball; and, lastly, the shell with a bad “driving-band,” that twittered with a peculiar

cadence through the air and was known as the canary-bird.

Of the fight on the right I need say little. The mounted brigade made a frontal attack on Hlangwana. The Boers were, as usual, invisible. The brigade had Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry on the right, the composite regiment in the middle and the South African Light Horse on the left. An enfilading fire from both sides of a gully up which the brigade was advancing opened suddenly; the brigade retired—was ordered to retire, as Lord Dundonald explains, who wished to remain and believes he could have taken the hill—and suffered heavily in the brief retirement. The enfilading fire drew another fire, which otherwise would doubtless have been reserved, from another party of Boers at the head of the gully.

When the retirement was nearly completed, an odd, inexplicable figure lingered about the battlefield. The time was neutral; we had left the field, but for a few stragglers; the Boers had not yet come on to it; only the aasvogels gathered in numbers, wheeling overhead with an eye on the horrid banquet. To the coarse or unseeing eye the figure might have been that of

a Dutchman or a German—the private soldier who saw it took it for that ; only the finer, sympathetic eye could see in it, through all the suspicious ways, through the wildness and evasiveness, unmistakable remnants of the British officer. He was riding an artillery horse, and his saddlebags were filled with booty of the field. But such booty ! Paltry little detached pieces of harness and artillery-horse furniture. He was brought into camp as a Dutch prisoner, and there an officer recognised him—an old comrade, an old war horse, who had returned to the battle. And the explanation ? “ Oh, sunstroke in India, or something of that sort, you know.” That was all. And then the old fellow was sent gently to the rear.

Prince Christian Victor was under fire, and very heavy fire too, with Sir Redvers Buller during the day. Although it was his first experience of the kind he was remarkable for his coolness. Indeed he seemed to enjoy it.

At noon all was practically over ; our loss in killed, wounded, and missing was 1,147. Never had been such an extraordinary sight—an enemy so conspicuous on the one side against an invisible

foe on the other. I had had just one glimpse of the Boers, and that had revealed their wonderful mobility ; it was a glimpse of perhaps fifty men galloping hard across a short, low neck at the back of two ridges, men who had come from their right after General Hart's repulse to reinforce their middle and left, and passed round at the back ; and unless one happened to glance at that neck, as I did, none would have known anything of the movement. Of course the Boers had the position—the only position—in the fight ; it is doubtful whether such a place as that across the Tugela is pregnable when held with modern weapons. Yet our advance was magnificent ; Sir Redvers Buller said he had never seen a finer. This must be said all the same—the skill with which the Boers had laid out their trenches and chosen positions for their guns, and the coolness and judgment with which they sat tight under artillery fire and reserved their fire till precisely the right moment, makes their defence of the Tugela one of the most notable of modern times ; a military feat comparable with the brilliant raid which they made into the heart of Natal taking their transport with them, risking and winning an engage-

ment at Brynbella Hill and returning north of the Tugela in safety. The good soldier will not depreciate these achievements, but will say that the people to whose credit they stand are worth beating.

The wounded came in on stretchers in converging lines from our left, middle, and right, and were received by the ambulance train on the railway—men with waxen grey faces and clotted bandages swathed about them; men who smiled at their friends and instantly changed the smile for a gripping spasm; men who were clinched between life and death; men who had died on the way and were now carried hurriedly and jerkily, since it no longer mattered; men who bore a slight pain contentedly because they were glad that they would be tucked away safely in a hospital for the rest of the campaign; men of a different constitution who took it ill that so slight a pain should cause them so great an incapacity; men who were mere limp, covered-up bundles, carried on stretchers through which something dark oozed and dropped. Why dwell on these details of a "specimen day"? The afternoon had fallen to evening before the last naval gun boomed out

a declaration that the British army would come and come again.

As for General Buller, he gained laurels from his defeat that are not always won by victorious generals. He sacrificed, or let me say, rather, he jeopardised, his own reputation in order to avert an irreparable sacrifice of his army. A weaker man, a less heroic soldier, would have carried the position with an appalling loss of life. Buller's decision to retire was a proof of his bravery and good generalship.



COMMANDANT-GENERAL JOUEERT

CHAPTER IX

WAITING AGAIN : WITH A CAMP INTERLUDE

FRERE CAMP, *Thursday, January 4th, 1900.*

"MAY we dress up, sir?" It was the child-like sailors who asked the innocent question on Christmas Day.

"What do you want to dress up as?" asked the naval officer.

"Please, sir, as John Bull, and if you don't mind, sir, as President Kroojer, sir, and might we 'ave a gun carriage, sir?"

"What for?"

"To take 'em round, sir."

The eloquent, smooth spokesman had said, and only the decision remained to be taken.

"Well, if you won't insult the old gentleman," said the naval officer, meaning Mr. Kruger.

"Very good, sir," said the bland and chuckling sailors.

The naval officer had said words which were his bare duty and had been indulgent at the same time, as was right and natural on Christmas Day ; and forthwith the figure of Mr. Kruger was destined to the honest comments of Jack and Tommy. John Bull wore a red face and a Union Jack, which covered a form of appropriate rotundity, and President "Kroojer" was more elaborately and tenderly equipped with a beard of unravelled rope, a stove-pipe hat made out of a tin cylinder, a black coat, a white flag, and a tattered umbrella, labelled, "The Effects of Lyddite." The spirit of fraternity with which the figures on the carriage treated each other after all secured the fulfilment of the officer's conditions.

All that day and the next the camp had the appearance and the spirit of a fair ; men were throwing stones for prizes at bottles hung in rows ; running foot-races in their stocking-feet ; wrestling on horseback stripped to the waist ; cock-fighting ; teams of soldiers were pulling tugs-of-war with sailors, and being beaten by them ; sailors were mounted precariously on horses and mules, and were so pleased at finding themselves on some

thing four-footed that they rode their animals without relaxation all day, and in the races cheerfully and invariably came in last; officers scampered across a rock-strewn and break-neck country in point-to-points; there were trotting races in which everybody cantered and the judge tore his hair; the air was filled with the fierce and peremptory shouts of the officers who were managing the soldiers' playtime—"B Company to pull now! B Company, here! B Company, *will you come here at once!* B COMPANY!"

"Please, sir, we've pulled three times running."

"Well, you'll have to pull again if you want to win," and at this point B Company obediently lays hold of the rope.

All the time the sun blazed on us, and the thick, floating atmosphere of dust sanded our clothes and hair, gritted our teeth, and choked our throats; and lastly, in the evenings there were concerts round bright fires, and a comic singer might have been heard banging out imitations of the "pom-pom" or Boer Vickers-Maxim gun on a piano brought from a looted farmhouse: "What's that?" he demanded when he had made the imitation, and

some of the men, to show that they recognised the wonderfully exact sound, slid down and ducked their heads behind their seats.

Only a few days before Sir Redvers Buller had suffered a reverse—Sir Redvers Buller for whom we had not admitted to ourselves the possibility of failure. And we were now in full sight of the hills where we had been checked, indeed within range of some of the guns which had helped to send us back to our camp ; yet we were not sad. After what I have said you will see that the camp was jovial ;—can it really be true that reverses are an incentive to glorious retrieval ? Of course all the camp was very sorry for the wounded men—the dead after all had appeared to be happy enough—but then this sorrow had lasted no longer or gone no deeper than sorrows commonly do in war-time. The fact is, the camp was in great spirits, triumphantly employing the new standard of emotions which war imposes. Whilst our fellow-countrymen in England were swallowed up at this time in the sublime emotions of pity and fear, we, with an unexpected reverse behind us, with the prospect (according to our belief) of the bloodiest battle of the campaign

before us, were just as I have described. A perfect study, you may say, in frames of mind.

After New Year's day the camp eased off from the riotous amusements of the fair to the sober daily sports of Englishmen. Tommy, being in a foreign land, has lost the spirit of convention which is part of his native climate. The world and the seasons are upside down, and he may just as well disregard things managed in so unusual a manner. Let us call it winter—January ought to be winter anyhow—and play football! I cannot discover that Tommy makes any discrimination between the days which he considers suitable for football and those which he considers suitable for cricket, unless it be that he plays football on the hottest days and cricket on the coolest. But then a man can play ducks and drakes with himself in this climate. The beautiful cool nights restore one. What does it matter what you do in the day, when the night, cool from sunset till sunrise, and even cold in the strange grey early hours, picks you up again, and turns you out as fresh as a lark? Why, a man can do anything here! You may have the heat of a furnace in the day, but it is not the

heat of the tropics in places where the land lies low—the heat that pursues you by night as well as by day, that brings mosquitoes as well as flies, and follows you remorselessly like a beast till you could cry out in the long pursuit for very weariness. Here, we are perched up near the skies, and if we are tempted to think that science is wrong, and that Icarus may have melted his wings after all by going too high, we can still thank Heaven for the nights.

For the nights—and the rain! At last it has come, and unless it holds off again for so long a time we are not likely to have another great dust-storm. Day after day a storm, with the blackness of night in its eye, swept across the camp and blotted it out. You could see it coming like a high, forbidding wall, and when it arrived you could not see from one tent to another. It tore and scoured through the camp; cattle and horses turned their backs to it and drooped their heads, or else drifted abjectly before it; and we in our tents sat with choked ears and noses and watery eyes; our papers were covered with a layer of dust, and our food was peppered all over before we could put it in our mouths. But when the

rain came it performed a miracle ; it simply washed away the old, dry, withered, khaki-coloured face of the country, as though it had swept it out with a stroke of a clean wet brush.

After the first few hours already through the shallow soil on the rock came the budding tint which was the earnest of green ; first the yellow changed from a withered colour into the golden pregnant yellow of ripened corn, and then from that it sank gently down to meet the tenderness of a rising green. One woke up the next morning to discover that the sky had poured down not water after all, but a paint-box full of colours ; to see no longer aridity shut in by stern, steel-grey mountains, but a waking land of multifarious colours merging its delicacies in the richer, fuller bloom of grey and blue mountains. And then at night there is the unceasing lightning, sometimes near, sometimes far away, but always somewhere.

To know what lightning really is one must come here. It is not a mere vivid flash of magnesium wire running from sky to earth, which is all we know in England ; it is a twisted and multiform figure, sometimes forking downwards, sometimes running upwards from the earth, sometimes flash-

ing horizontally as though it were suspended in the air ; and its colours are mauve and pink and purple, like the colours on those twisted electric wires which are contained in glass tubes. Sometimes it is worth while to be kept awake, and one occasion is when the rain is booming like a drum on your tight-stretched tent, and the image of your cart and your ponies standing outside keeps leaping out of the darkness and appearing in a perfect shadow-show on the screen made by the front of your tent. But it blows, too, with these storms ; and I have spent an hour in the darkness holding on to the poles of my tent while several of the guy-ropes fretted and flicked their pegs out of the ground, and having got them at their command whirled and slashed round the tent like Kaffir bullock-whips. Then the lightning drew away, though it did not cease, and the wind snuffed out, as is its way, as suddenly as it had come ; and the rest of the night was full of quiet breathing.

Take it for all in all this is a great country for campaigning. It would be ideal if there were more trees and fewer flies. There are many poisonous and voracious flies in Africa, but justice has not

been done to the dangerous qualities of the South African domestic fly. It certainly produces a kind of madness or frenzy. Its persistence is beyond belief. It calls you in the morning early, and it spends the day with you in close attendance upon your head; finally it goes to bed in your tent near your head, in order that it may be ready to call you again the next morning. It is sometimes a little late in getting up on a cold morning, but then it is always too early for you. Its faithfulness would only require to be less distressing to be admirable. I can ride, for instance, from here to the Chieveley camp, seven miles, and take the same fly with me all the way there and back. After a long journey he may go to bed a little earlier—I don't know—but I am sure he does not get up any later the next morning.

But, to return to the graver aspect of our situation, what does all this waiting mean? Of course we knew that a long wait was intended when the greater part of the troops moved back to Frere from Chieveley. It means that twenty thousand men were not enough to cross the Tugela. It means that Sir Redvers Buller has met what is perhaps the greatest irony of his

life. I believe he said years ago, long before war was imminent, that Natal north of the Tugela was an impossible field of operations for our troops; and now it is his fate to try to make those cursed hills possible. The next fight will be a grave moment; and at least he will not make it graver by neglecting to add Sir Charles Warren's division to the twenty thousand men with whom he fought the battle of Colenso.

Probably not more than three people know what the next plan of attack will be. Shall we try to flatten out those desperate Colenso hills with howitzers and more guns, and make another frontal attack, or shall we send a column to the west, or a column to the east, or columns both ways simultaneously, while a containing force remains at Chieveley? Frankly I am not one of the three, and I do not know. But it need not be thought that our delay here is entirely unprofitable. It need not equal the policy of the great Delayer to have still a good deal of profit in it. And the profit of it is that we are pinning down across the Tugela and round Ladysmith a force of some 25,000 Boers, many of whom would otherwise be employed elsewhere.

The French in Metz were not quite useless while they demanded the attention of a couple of hundred thousand Germans. In a wide sense, too, if you can look at it so, we are besieging the Boers in those northern hills of Natal, and we might soon be doing so in a more precise sense were it not that there is a siege within a siege. That Ladysmith should have been held at all is the trouble, and it had to be held because it had been made a great depôt, and that is the greatest trouble of all. Meanwhile our naval guns daily shell the Boer trenches for an hour or so. None can say what the result is. Are there Boers in the trenches when we shell them? Sometimes we know there are, for we see them scattering. This at least we know, that when lyddite strikes it does not wound, and the resolution with which the Boers stay in their trenches must be the measure of their losses.

The Boers continue their conspiracy of invisibility. Perhaps we have not prosecuted very sedulously the policy of worry. Our reconnoiters fail to discover their positions. We have no one here who can make them answer to his will with the hand and eye of the circus-master. We have

no one who can make them fire all night by simply hanging up a red lamp in a field. On one of the nights when we feigned an attack the Boers simply scrutinised us with a searchlight. Our searchlight, when it signals to Ladysmith, is met by theirs, and the two fence with one another ludicrously in the sky.

The latest diversion in our preparations here is the arrival of the traction engines and a balloon. The traction engines go faster than any I ever saw. The balloon has not yet risen. The fact is there has been a miscalculation. The balloon is designed to ascend 4,000 feet, which is excellent at Aldershot; but here we are up 3,500 feet already, so that the balloon has a margin in hand of only 500 feet. I hope the aeronauts will manage to get it up by relieving it of the cradle and sending up some light, acrobatic observer in the ropes. Otherwise I fear that when we get to a still higher place in the hills the balloon will try to go through the ground.

Mr. Winston Churchill has returned to us, haggard after his escape from Pretoria. After chafing in confinement he was hunted for nine days—and what is more wearing than to be pur-

sued? Yet I do not know which—the chafing or the being pursued—would make a man of his character the paler. I think the chafing. He has told me the story of his escape, but I must not tell it for him. Over ninety shells, he said, were fired at the armoured train. “Yes, you were right,” he went on, “shell fire is a firework—but a *terrifying* firework.” We had discussed it on board the *Dunottar Castle*, and I had said that shell fire was a firework compared with bullets.

Then he explained how the party in the armoured train came to surrender. “Now mind—no surrender!” Haldane had said as the party left the train to fall back on some cottages. How often I had heard Haldane and Churchill crying out upon the number of prisoners taken in this campaign! But two Tommies waved handkerchiefs without authority, and in a moment the Boers were sweeping round them—it was out of the question to fire when the signal had been accepted—“rounding us up,” as Churchill said, “like cattle! The greatest indignity of my life!” Churchill had been merely grazed on the hand. The officer commanding the Boer guns came down from his kopje and raised his hat to his prisoners.

"I regret very much," said he, "the necessity of firing on you, but the fortunes of war, you know—my turn to-day, perhaps your turn to-morrow!"—a sentiment quite in the manner of the past times that people praise.

Then came the long march to the Boer camp, with scrupulously polite conversation.

"What garrison have you at Estcourt?" a Boer officer asked Churchill.

"Forgive me," was the answer, given in the tone of all the conversation, "but is that, do you think a fair question to ask me, even though I am a prisoner?"

"I beg your pardon," said the Boer; "I should not have asked it." And it was not asked again.

At last the Boer camp was reached, and at night—the last thing—came a volume of sound that swept on to Churchill's ears as he lay on the ground, and startled him almost inhumanly. It was a volume of human voices singing the fervid closing psalm of the day. "Ah, but it was worse than shells to hear," he told me. "It struck the fear of God into me. What sort of men are these we are fighting? They have the better cause—

and the cause is everything—at least, I mean to them it is the better cause.”

“In Pretoria,” he continued, “all the Boers I met asked me what we were fighting for. To them—and the argument was repeated by all like a lesson learned by rote—it appeared that the war had come about because the wicked capitalists wished to take their country. They were fighting for their homes. ‘But,’ they used to say, ‘none of your officers can tell us what the war is about. They say they fight because they are told to fight. Is not that very wrong?’”

When Churchill escaped he left a letter for a Boer official who had often visited him, regretting that circumstances did not permit him to take a more formal farewell. Then came the nine days flight with his footsteps dogged. How he wandered in a wood and hid in a goods train is not my story to tell; it must be read as he writes it. Here, I know, he sits in my tent with a new and lively conviction of the Boer military genius.

CHAPTER X

WE TRY ONE WAY ROUND

NEAR POTGIETER'S DRIFT,

Sunday, January 14th, 1900.

SUCH a banging had never been heard at Ladysmith. The voice of guns that floated over the hills to us who lay in Frere Camp was almost incessant, and reminded us of the first hours in the battle of Colenso. It was early—still dark—on Saturday, January 6th, and the sound had awakened some of us. Boom—boom—boom—boom! What a cannonade! Sometimes one could swear the sound was coming nearer as it burst down the breeze. Was Sir George White making out of Ladysmith southward? At other times it receded on the varying wind till it felt the merest crepitation, on the ear. Anyhow, something extraordinary was happening; perhaps the garrison of Ladysmith was crowning with som

act of skill and gallantry a skilful and gallant siege; perhaps the siege was now coming to its loud termination, and having come would still remain memorable for resource and daring, and memorable as the siege by which Sir George White won back his reputation.

In the afternoon the heliographs winked out the explanation: the Boers had assaulted Ladysmith, had pressed the attack home with unquestionable courage, but had been beaten splendidly back on all sides; Lord Ava was badly wounded; the battle was continuing; the list of casualties would follow. With that little we must remain content till the sun flickered through a black sky for only a few minutes the next day, and then we learned that the battle had see-sawed all day; that three times the Boers had taken trenches on Cæsar's Camp, and three times had been driven out; that only one captured position had remained in their hands all day, and that at dusk the Devons, in a charge, had taken that back too, with the bayonet. In short, we had routed the Boers, and the Boers had routed the last of our fallacies—the fallacy that they were incapable of assaulting a fortified place. Possibly they liked the job little enough; they

had taken long to make up their minds to it ; but still they had done it, and done it with courage.

The casualties on our side, fourteen officers killed, thirty-one wounded ; 143 men killed, 228 wounded (an unusual proportion of killed to wounded) showed that the fighting had been at very close quarters. And the Boer loss ? So far as I can ascertain it was roughly 150 killed and 600 wounded. Mr. Kruger is said to have ordered the assault. Whoever ordered it was indisputably right ; on all tactical grounds it was advisable to take Ladysmith then if it ever could be taken, and disengage the investing force for the defence of the Tugela.

The assault failed, and is only one more proof of a belief that approaches universal acceptance—namely, that a soundly fortified place defended by modern weapons cannot be taken by a frontal attack unless those weapons be in the hands of incompetents. The Boers, with all the advantages of numbers, fail to take Kimberley, Mafeking, Ladysmith ; we fail to take the fortified hills wherever they stand in the way of our advance. According to the merely mechanical computations, then, to which all military reckon-

ings are reduced to-day, it is necessary to outnumber one's enemy by three or four to one, to have a fair chance of working round his flanks and driving him from hills and trenches. The Boers unhappily have the positions—they took them before we arrived—and it is not true to say that we shall be able to defeat them only by outnumbering them in a cowardly manner. They would need to do the same thing if they were in our place; the need is imposed not so much by disparities in skill or courage as by the calculable restrictions of modern warfare.

I rode over early to Chieveley on the morning of the assault on Ladysmith; the sound of the firing might awake a response there, as it had already aroused an echo. I saw many Boers scurrying over the hills at the back of Colenso towards Ladysmith. Was not this the time, if not to test again the strength of the enemy, at least to relieve the pressure on Ladysmith? Slowly the idea became an order in the camp, and the order became a body of men marching out on to the plain—Hildyard's and Barton's brigades, the Mounted Infantry, and a couple of batteries. This was not till two o'clock. The

infantry advanced very slowly in dotted lines and the batteries began to search the Boer positions, working from east to west till they had studded the whole line with shells. While the guns barked, a great darkness and a veiling mist drifted down on the hills so that they were hidden from our naval gunners at Chieveley Camp ; the naval gunners ceased firing, and the flashes of the field artillery on the plain were like matches being struck in the dark. Then came lightning in the inkiness, vivid and ghastly, striking down vertically on to the Colenso hills, but not a syllable of an answer did the Boers offer to the bombardment of either heaven or earth. If this is a "demonstration" (which it was), let it be, they thought ; if not, let us wait till it comes nearer. But the temptation to spend ammunition on our retirement must have been almost unconquerable. What is this wonderful intelligence in the individual that links itself into a chain through all the commandoes, and plays the part of a cultivated discipline ?

On Tuesday, January 9th, I happened to be riding back from Estcourt to Frere. Sir Charles Warren's division was marching on the same road.

It was raining. The sky might have been—indeed, it was—a shower-bath. The rain came through the still air in a steady, teeming, straight downpour that threshed in one's ears. I wore an oilskin coat, but it was useless ; the rain found assailable chinks or else beat its way through, I know not which. I know only that in five minutes I was wet to the skin. The hills seemed to melt down like tallow under heat ; the rain beat the earth into liquid and the thick, earthy liquid ran down in terraced cascades. Wherever one turned one's pony, on the road or aside into the veldt, he splashed ankle-deep. From Estcourt to Frere the division waded, sliding, sucking, pumping, gurgling through the mud ; the horses floundered or toboganned with all four feet together ; the waggons lurched axle-deep into heavy sloughs and had to be dragged out with trebled teams of oxen. And it was cold too, for the rain of even a tropical country can make you cold when you have been wet to the skin for hours. Men who had halted by the wayside for the frequent undesired rests shivered with grey, wet faces, played at hot-hands, chewed pipes which had long since gone out, and which there was no hope of relighting, or cheered to show that they were neither wet nor miserable.

I happened to fall in with a staff officer and at last we came to a place where the troops thickened on the road and flowed out on both sides on to the veldt. It was a block. And the explanation sounded audibly in our ears—at the foot of the hill a tearing stream, boiling and foaming over the rocks.

"A river!" said the staff officer. "I thought you knew this road?"

"I've been over it a few times," said I.

"Surely, you knew then that there was a river?"

"There never was before."

And now we began to see that this rollicking stream was the growth of only two or three hours. There, on the other side, was a whole battalion which had passed through it only an hour before and was now cut off from us. Staff officers trotted up and down the banks and asked if the pontoons were not yet in sight; a sapper was casting a plummet into the water and drawing it up every time with a very grave face. Still the pontoons did not come. But after we had waited an hour the water began to fall as quickly as it must have risen. Probably less water was coming from the hills, though where we stood it was

raining as hard as ever. The water must have sunk two or three feet while I watched it, but still no one seemed to have a thought of crossing without the pontoons. It was at this point that a colonial trotted down to the stream, looking neither to right nor left at the block; perhaps he thought we had halted for a rest or for fun. He drove his horse in, kicked him in the sides, drew up his legs, and—by Jove!—he was across. This fussing stream was not so bad as it looked. My pony stood as high as the colonial's, and the lead was good enough. Jab in your spurs, draw your knees up on the saddle, keep your horse's head up-stream, and never look at the water; there is a plunge in the middle when the horse is nearly or quite off his legs for a second and a rushing in your ears, the water is piled up at his chest, and then it begins to fall away on his dripping flanks, and suddenly you are trotting up the opposite bank. This was the beginning of the flood which turned out to be at once the anxiety and the advantage of the whole army. Thus Sir Charles Warren's division came to Frere.

Sir Redvers Buller has now some 30,000 men. These are: the 2nd Division (Sir F. Clery),

including 2nd Brigade (Hildyard), 5th Brigade (Hart), and 6th Brigade (Barton). The divisional troops are one squadron 13th Hussars, the 7th, 64th, and 73rd batteries R.F.A. (Parsons). Ammunition column, the 17th Field Company R.E. The 5th Division (Sir Charles Warren) includes 4th Brigade (Lyttelton), and 11th Brigade (Coke), which consists of 2nd Royal Lancaster Regiment, 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, 1st South Lancashire Regiment, and 1st York and Lancaster Regiments; and the divisional troops are one squadron 13th Hussars, the 19th, 28th, and 63rd batteries R.F.A. (Montgomery), and the ammunition column is the 37th Field Company R.E. The 10th Brigade, including the 2nd Dorsets, 2nd Middlesex, and 2nd Somerset Light Infantry, is being employed as an odd brigade to be drawn upon when necessary. The corps troops are one squadron of the 13th Hussars attached to headquarters, the 78th Battery R.F.A., the 61st Howitzer Battery, No. 4 Mountain Battery (2·5 inch), &c.—the Mounted Infantry being nearly 3,000 men.

In this list I have given the constitution only of the brigades which I have not described in earlier chapters.

Warren's troops shook out their tents for one night at Frere. First, up with the poles to get the distances right, and acres of ground suddenly become a hop-garden in early spring; then down with the poles and hook on the canvas, and next you have a reeling set of houses swinging askew; that stage lasts till the anvil-clatter of the mallets and pegs has ceased and the ropes are drawn tight; and then the tents stiffen up and hold themselves erect like soldiers; and, behold, there is a neat town of conical houses as tight as drums. The men gratefully draw themselves inside, buzzing with conversation. Here at last a man can light a pipe!

All Wednesday and Thursday, January 10th and 11th, the great column—30,000 men, taking their tents and all their transport—the whole of Buller's army, was moving westward to Springfield. When the American military attaché had been shown the Colenso hills after the reverse of December 15th, and he had gazed at them for a few minutes, he said to the officer with him, "Say, colonel, is there no way round?" Now we were trying a way round.

None of us had ever seen such a sight. You

looked down from any hill and the army was like a rope being drawn slowly across the country as far as you could see; here and there it dropped into a spruit, but it rose again on the other side; here and there it disappeared behind a kopje, but you could pick it up again beyond. It seemed endless, this rope made of all the strands that hold an army together—infantry, guns, gunners, ammunition, horsemen, waggons with forage, rations and tents; waggons hung all over like a gipsy van with clattering utensils, Kaffirs plying whips like fishing-rods, bakers, cooks, farriers, telegraphists, type-writers, paymasters, and paymasters' clerks, post-office clerks, telegraph wires and poles, sappers, chaplains, doctors, ambulance waggons, bearers, "body-snatchers," signallers with flags and heliographs, sailors, naval guns, headquarters staffs, cobblers, balloons, and aëronauts, limelight flashlights, traction engines with heavy lists to port or starboard, pontoons, &c., &c., &c.

Frere was left once again a hollow place. Barton's brigade remained at Chieveley as a containing force, endowed with that precious possession, the Russian poodle—the name given to the armoured

engine which the sailors had draped all over with ropes hanging down to the ground in tassels. Hildyard's brigade marched over the hills from Chieveley and cut into the main column on the Springfield road. The rain had ceased, but the floods were out, and the passages through spruits were nightmares—carts overturned in the water, wheels off, mules mixed up, fighting and knotted in their harness and half drowning, oxen with their heads borne down under water and heaving with all their mighty strength to the opposite bank, a gun or a heavy waggon stuck, and the river of traffic looping round it as water flows round an island ; spare teams of oxen moving about to help the unfortunate out of difficulties, a traction engine, with one wheel almost buried in soft mud and two other engines pulling at it ; Kaffir drivers with fearful mouthings yapping like terriers, having nearly lost their voices, or making no noise at all ; Kaffirs flogging animals indiscriminately and the animals bearing the weals on their bodies ; mules consenting to be flogged so long as they snatched passing mouthfuls of water ; fatigue parties of soldiers throwing down rushes on the squishy mud to make it unappreciably firmer. And imagine all

this scene, directed (if you care to add to the nightmare), directed by a man who is one of the worst types of the colonial, a man constantly laying his whip across the heads of Kaffirs—a performance for which he wins the applause, without inquiry, of some one on the bank who deserves to rank as his equal—a man who mistakes rudeness for independence and surliness for firmness. At least it was pleasant to see that we could beat some people at their own trades—for nothing went better through the traps of mud and water than the limber teams of our own gunners. A dash, a clatter, a frothing, and before you could wink your eye they were on the other bank! The colonials stared, open-eyed.

But this new land we marched into was, on the whole, green and pleasant. Sometimes it was like a riding of Yorkshire for clean and airy emptiness; sometimes, for the dark trees, the drifting mist on the hills, and the discoloured broken streams, it reminded one of Scotland. Here were marching Yorkshire troops who had left England exactly four weeks before, and they might now have been in their own country.

The column emulated the army in Flanders

and swore terribly. And the reason of the swearing was that the floods were out and it was supposed that we were too late to cross the Tugela. But it so happened that the flood was to our advantage. The Boers, too, who were on this side of the Tugela feared that they would not be able to recross it, and they left the great hill barring the way to Potgieter's Drift, meaning no doubt to reoccupy it later. Lord Dundonald, who had gone ahead of the column with some mounted infantry, had no orders to go beyond Springfield, but when he found that Observation Hill, as we have named our new position, was unoccupied, he marched on to it and held it. Six hundred men and two guns to keep it! An anxious night was passed; it was a strange thing this unoccupied hill, there might be some snare. But daylight showed the truth, in the shape of a noble panorama. We had gained much by winning the race for the hill—for the first time we looked down on the Boers—but we had not gained everything. Near Potgieter's Drift the river makes a tongue of land where troops would have to enter in tight formation, and this tongue is commanded by hills on the right, the left, and in front. No doubt the

Boers were satisfied with what they had retained.

Observation Hill falls deeply and precipitously towards the river ; and the Tugela (a Meander of a river) doubles and redoubles upon itself, a glistening band at our feet. To the north-east we look across open country and can see, not Ladysmith itself, but one of our camps just outside it. What a view of a battle there would be from Observation Hill ; it would be spread like a war-game on a table for one's inspection ! "We ought to 'ave the Queen 'ere to see it," said a gunner. "Ah, then we should smash 'em !" said his loyal comrade.

On the hills opposite us the Boers work continually ; at least this time we can see some of their guns. "Good navvies, ain't they ?" said my friend the gunner ; and his comrade rejoined, "Like moles—the way they turn the earth over !" Then he continued, "What are we showin' ourselves and our guns 'ere for ?" Upon that the first gunner replied ironically, "Don't yer know ? That's to give 'em plenty of time to get ready."

Plenty of time to get ready ! Having arrived here with a dash we have sat down and done nothing for two days, while a great part of the army ha-

remained strung out on the road behind us. But does not this mean that the Boers are welcome to fix their guns, that we intend no second frontal attack, that there is even yet another way round ?

CHAPTER XI

ACROSS THE TUGELA

SPEARMAN'S FARM CAMP,

Sunday, January 28th, 1900.

ACROSS the Tugela! There at the foot of Mount Alice was the familiar line of troops, moving snakewise by the devious track; its head had already darted across the river, and not a shot had been fired. Ah, but would not the sudden yellow flashes rip along that row of hills in front? Remembering Colenso, one looked from the troops to the hills, and from the hills to the troops in a constant anxious alternation. But the line drew itself continually forward along the track. To me looking down on the troops from Mount Alice—a hill fit for Xerxes to watch from—the men were little figures being moved about on a map. The map was large, the figures were small. The veld can swallow up thirty or forty thousand men and

make nothing of them; you might gaze across a few clear miles of it and not see that the army, whose mobilisation has caused so much fuss and expense, was there at all. And then the hills opposite Mount Alice were gloomy and leaden and silent; and the light was like that of a dull November afternoon in England. Not a man, not a sign of life showed. Were the Boers really there? Was this war at all?

The men were wading across the river at Potgieter's Drift holding on to one another's rifles; some were resting on a tiny archipelago half way over; others were neck-deep (and they had to bivouac that night!); others again were being hauled across in a pont—the pont which some of the South African Horse had won by swimming across under fire when Lord Dundonald had made his dash on Mount Alice—these men stood in a row, glued together at the shoulders like little wooden soldiers. It was the evening of Tuesday, January 16th, and this was General Lyttelton's brigade crossing. Those who were waiting for their turn to go over spread out in hedges and divided the veldt into Sussex meadows. The evening was heavy-eyed and silent—dead; you imagined that

men down there spoke to one another in whispers : a dreary mist bringing the night was dropping down the hills, the river was dross of lead, a changing breeze in the mimosas, the creak of a waggon-wheel below, the whirr of partridges and the cry of other birds fell on your ear, with a stroke almost mysterious. Two battalions had halted half-way down to the river, and their fires twinkled brighter and brighter. They were to cross in the morning. But already we had thrown an arm over the river to show that it was ours : we had done it without firing a shot, yet the sight had thrilled me more than a battle could.

Mount Alice takes one step down to the river, and on the step—a broad plateau—six naval twelve-pounders were placed. On one of the crests of Mount Alice were two 4·7 naval guns. January 17th was the first day of serious bombardment. The naval guns were helped by six howitzers placed among the sheltering infantry behind a string of small kopjes just across the river. Submarine mines of earth and smoke—as they seemed—began to spout into the air where the lyddite struck ; on the left the shells struck on the eastern and northern ridges of Spion Kop ; to

the right they struck on Brakfontein ; in the lower, more open country between they fell on road and plain, and in the twisted dongas. Up, down, high and low, this side and beyond, they peppered the faces of the hills. Sometimes the explosion was all a pure white burst of smoke, sometimes it was all a cloud of red-brown dust ; sometimes—and then it seemed most terrible—it was a great dark black and grey pillar seamed viciously with white.

The noise of a bombardment in a hilly country seems to reveal an instrument of changing tunes. The first clean whistle of the projectile as it goes from the muzzle of the gun becomes the sound of a train passing through a valley or dashing out of a tunnel when the hills and kloofs catch the rushing voice in the air and give it back. Sometimes there is the rasping noise of iron being drawn over iron which strikes you as the wrong song for the smooth, whizzing missile ; sometimes there is the far truer note of a scythe swishing through grass. Upon the flash and smoke rolling upwards comes the crash of the explosion—the thunder, if the shell was fired from a howitzer—rolling in the folds of the hills and dying in a wail. You might have thought that the hills opposite were held (at an

extravagant estimate) by fifty men. When you had searched them for a couple of hours with your glasses you had seen perhaps six Boers. Some dummy epaulments were plain but if there were guns anywhere you could not see them. If this had been your first experience of the Boers you might have said, "There are no Boers, we can walk over those hills when we like." I had seen the battle of Colenso, and therefore I did not say it or think it. The explosion of our shells was the only sound that came from the Boer hills. At last we grew confidently to expect no answer from the enemy; we stood about on our skyline to watch the bombardment, and no longer looked to see British gunners fall by their guns in full view of the enemy. The Boer knows how to sacrifice an opportunity to the possibility of a better.

"What are we waiting 'ere for? Why don't we go on?"

It was the question one private asked another on Mount Alice.

Don't yer know?"

No," said the first man.

To give the Boers time to build up their trenches and fetch up their guns. Fair—ain't it?"

That was the private soldier's laconic criticism of the General's policy. I do not take the responsibility of confirming it; on the other hand, I shun the equal responsibility of traversing it. A week passed between the arrival of most of our troops and the delivery of Sir Charles Warren's attack. Every day we waited at Spearman's Farm Camp we could see men and waggons arriving by the Colenso and Ladysmith roads at the rear of the Boer position. But if I form my own opinion at least I feel assured that some equally obvious reflections must have presented themselves to the General.

On one of these days—Wednesday, January 17th—we who kept watch on Mount Alice saw for the first time a narrow strip of black stretched across the river five miles to the west. In the glasses it became a pontoon bridge, and, further, something moved upon it. The uncertain objects resolved themselves; a long column wriggled out from a gully; men, horses, guns, waggons, moved steadily across the bridge; on the other side the infantry filed up into pools of brown, then ordered themselves and went forward in open lines. Sir Charles Warren was crossing the Tugela at Waggon Drift.

Boom, boom, boom, boom ! The sound of fifteen-pounders floated up to us. It was really nothing at all—a handful of Boers had sniped at the troops from a farmhouse and the gunners were telling them not to. The few Boers fled up the hills; one man in the Devons lay dead from a long-range stray shot.

All that day and the next the column moved across; there were Sir Charles Warren, General Clery, General Hildyard and his brigade, General Hart and his brigade, General Woodgate and his brigade, Lord Dundonald and the mounted infantry, and half a dozen batteries. The next day Warren's column was still crossing, and on the same day General Lyttelton's brigade made a demonstration in front of Mount Alice.

The business of demonstrators is to appear to be about to do something which they have no intention of doing. Now the brigade went out with attack written on its face; it advanced in an order more open than I had ever seen employed before—General Lyttelton is a man who knows what he is about—and arrived almost within rifle shot of the Boer hills. If the Boers had fired the appearance of attack would have melted from the face of the

brigade, we should have known where the Boer guns were, and we should have kept back some of the enemy who might have gone to trouble Sir Charles Warren. Something of that sort is what is expected of every ordinarily constituted enemy before whom a demonstration is made. But you might as well set a terrier running before the Boer lines and expect that their fire will be drawn as hope to draw it by a demonstration.

This was the day that the balloon disappointed the pessimists. It swelled into a great yellow tulip growing out of the veldt behind the kopjes across the river, and then it sailed nobly up, car and all, and the man in the car signalled what he could see. One day later, when the Boers had indulged us for the first time by firing a few rounds from a Vickers-Maxim, the balloon was shot through by a shell, but the rent nearly closed itself automatically, and the "balloonatic" in the car—the word by which some one has expressed the combination of reckless qualities which are necessary to the true military aeronaut—stayed up for an hour afterwards, doubtful but heroic, lest the Boers should think it was any use firing shells at a balloon.

On Friday, January 19th, I crossed Waggon Drift, and rode some five miles further to the advanced position of Sir Charles Warren, who was now marching west. Obviously the plan was this: Warren was to make a long march round and attack the Boer hills in the rear, and the force remaining at Potgieter's Drift would simultaneously attack them in front. Warren's troops were, in a word, to become a detached force; they would disappear round the stretching hills and when we heard them banging away behind Spion Kop we who stayed behind would have our signal to advance. I found the force halted in a saucer of ground—guns limbered up and ready to move on, waggons, and infinite teams of oxen and mules, infantry in patches, men asleep on their backs with the flies in a swarm about them, and the spiteful sun scorching their faces. The sappers were throwing a bridge across Venter's Spruit, a tributary of the Tugela, but the column could cross somehow without that.

"What are we waiting for?" A gunner with his helmet tilted over his nose spoke from the ground.

"Cavalry support, I suppose," an equally sleepy voice answered.

"Hope we shan't stay in this hole to-night. See that hill over there?"

Two or three heads were raised.

"Good place for a gun. What do you think?"

"A Boer gun?"

"Yes—nothing to prevent it, is there?"

"Nothing that I can see—they will have one there by the morning if we don't look out."

"Ah, there's the cavalry!"

A popping of rifles came from beyond the ridges north of us. Cavalry patrols were on the southern slopes of the chain of hills which shoots out roughly at right angles from the western flank of Spion Kop and lies, roughly again, parallel with the Tugela. The river and the hills run east and west. On the sky-line of the hills we could see hundreds of Boers keeping pace with Warren's march. When the Boers are on the high sky-lines and connected ridges they do not mind showing themselves. It was the old situation; the Boers up in the skies and we looking at them from low and cuppy ground.

I wandered on to a patch of infantry; officers lay under waggon, not all were sheltered: some had only their heads possessing a bit of the slender shadow.

"Have you seen my battalion?"

The officer who asked me was seated on a sort of high improvised throne under a hood at the back of a large waggon, and reminded one of a circus-queen in a procession. I had no idea where his battalion was. He told me the force had five days' food, so that it had to march round, fight, and join hands with Sir Redvers Buller in five days. What food there was was therefore of a stern quality, and the officer accepted a tin of sardines from me with a diverting mixture of rapture and scruples.

Warren's force appeared to be now detached. I wished it luck and hurried homewards lest the bridge at Waggon Drift—the last link between the two wings of the army—should be cut before I reached it. But the next morning showed that there had been a complete change of plans, partly, I suppose, because the food with the force was not enough for the undertaking, and the delay of waiting for more would have been fatal; and partly because it had been discovered that after all there was no way round to the back of Spion Kop through open country. The hills on which the Boers were, are, in fact, a spur of the Drakens-

berg mountains; wherever Sir Charles Warren might go he must go through mountains. Therefore the force had doubled back on itself, extricated itself from the dangerous hollow of ground, and before daylight was advancing towards the crest of the hills immediately west of Spion Kop. This was on Saturday, January 20th. It was the first day of a six days' battle.

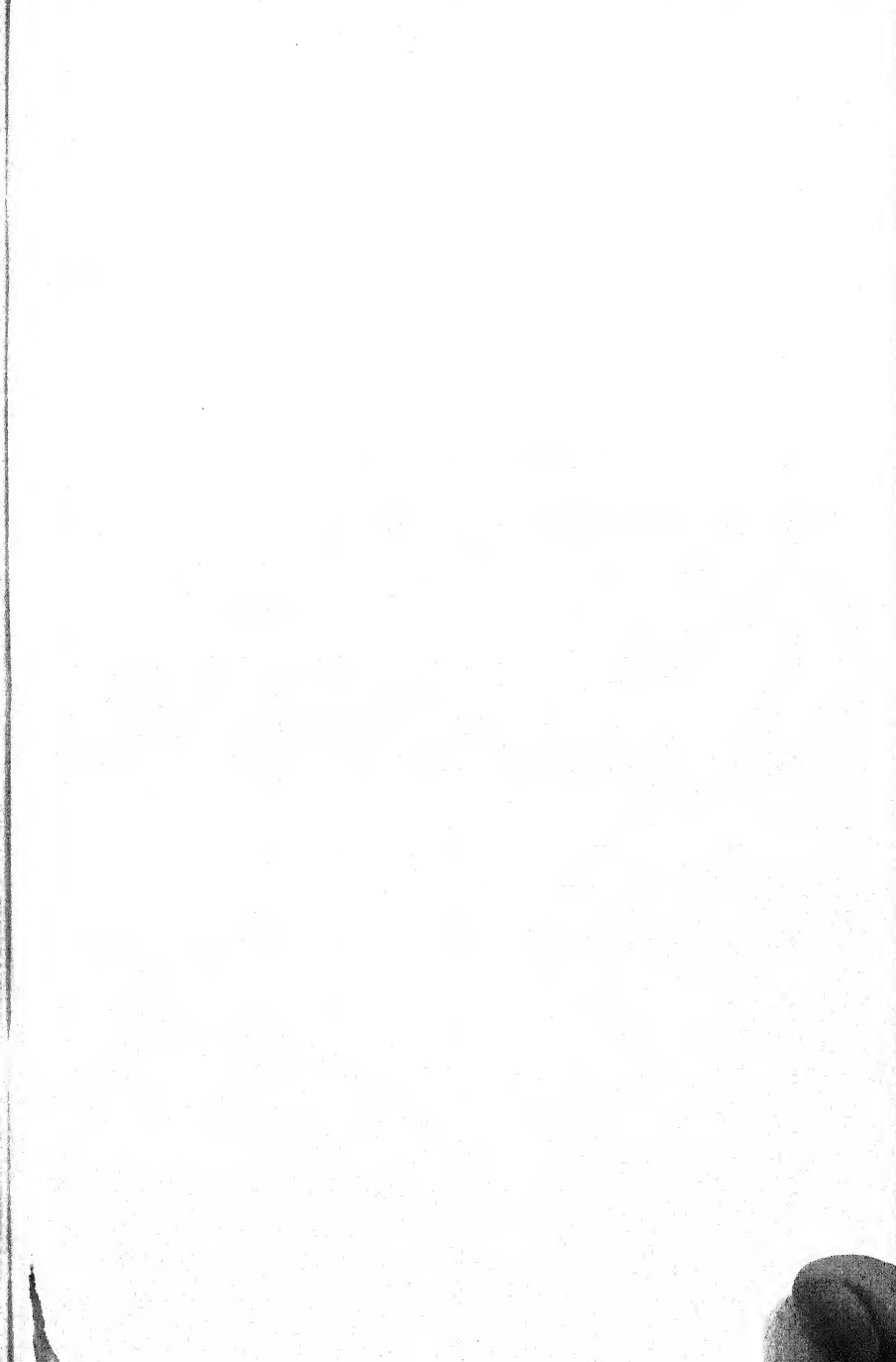
CHAPTER XII

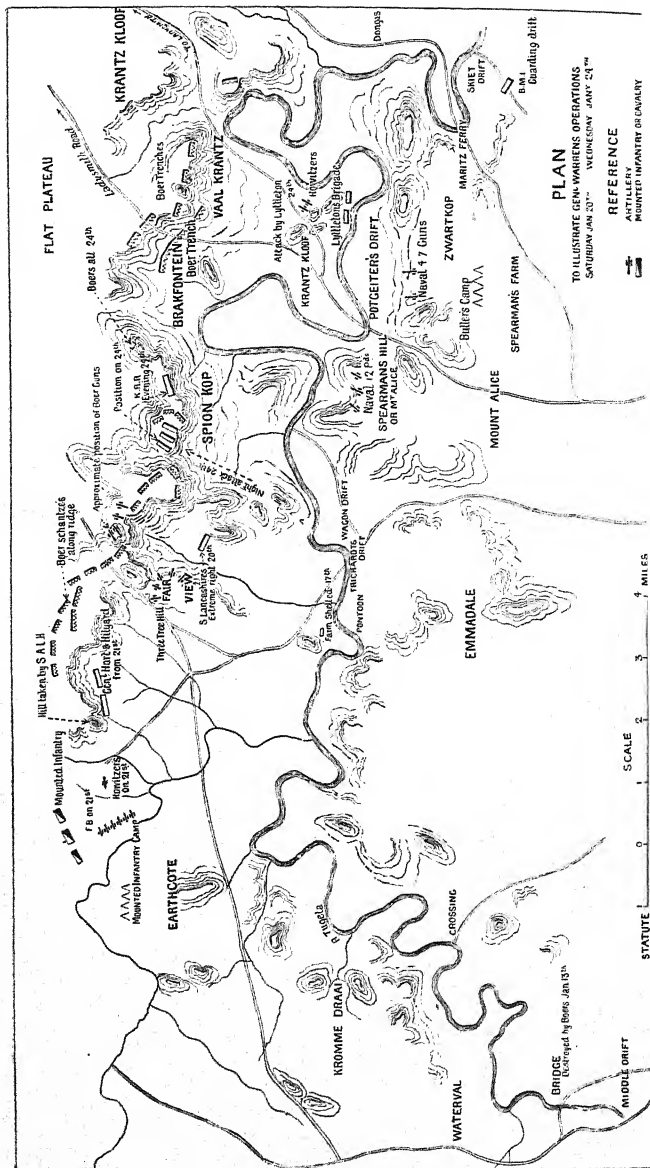
THE BATTLES OF VENTER'S SPRUIT AND SPION KOP

SPEARMAN'S FARM CAMP,

Tuesday, January 30th, 1900.

IF you looked up from the Tugela to the hills in which Sir Charles Warren fought you would say that they rose in a continuous slope to the top. But South African hills are like the sea: at a distance they seem smooth, but look close into them and you will find unsuspected valleys and crests. Nothing on the face of South African nature is what it seems. You see the British trenches up there, seeming to lie immediately under the Boer trenches, but if you go up you will find that they are on different hills, and a deep valley lies between. You see troops march out on to a sheer plain; and when they have disappeared suddenly in their march you learn for





the first time that the plain is no plain but is full of dips and rises, dongas and unremarked kopjes. From the river it seemed for almost a week that Warren's troops were within charging distance of the crests of all those hills ; really they remained from the crests the distance that separates a victory from a retirement.

If a turning movement was to be made in those hills at all it needed to be made at once—before the Boers had built their works so far to the west. If time were allowed to pass, the turning movement became a frontal attack. It was Sir Charles Warren's misfortune to make a frontal attack.

It were unprofitable and tedious to describe all the details of a six days' battle which was visible only on one side. On all those days in varying degrees the hills crashed with guns and rattled with musketry. At a little distance you might have supposed that the resonant noises came from some haunted mountain ; for the hills looked sleepy and peaceful and deserted, and there seemed to be no reason for all those strange sounds—the bark of field guns, the crackle of musketry, the rapping of Vickers-Maxims, and the tat-tat-tat-tat-tat of Maxims.

At 3 a.m. on Saturday, January 20th, General Woodgate occupied a kopje half-way up to the crest-line of the hills, and guns were placed on it. Three Tree Hill it was named, though the cause of the name was soon removed. More guns were placed on a kopje to the right, more again to the left on the plain at the foot of the hills. Only the great hill Spion Kop now divided the right wing of our army—the force, that is to say, at Potgieter's—from the left. At eight o'clock the guns on Three Tree Hill fired the first cannon-shots ever heard on those desolate hills. The infantry prepared to advance; General Woodgate was on the right, General Hart was in the middle, General Hildyard was on the left, but two battalions (the Lancashire Fusiliers and the York and Lancaster Regiment) belonging to General Woodgate's Lancashire Brigade had been transferred to General Hart's brigade. Up went the infantry, for another attack on hills, another frontal attack! You had some difficulty to pick them out from the freckled hillsides—were those rocks or men in khaki up there on the side of that kopje? Rocks. No—they move—they are men. They advance. General Hart, with the strongest

brigade, was ahead of the others. One inferior height after another was put behind him in the series of kopjes that rise to the sky. And the Boers? They were invisible. Jagged schantzes against the sky showed where a few hundreds were. The rest had become part of the rocks and the brown grass. Soon even our own infantry became invisible from Three Tree Hill—invisible, unless you had the true eye for infantry, which can pick out its object, as the fisherman can in a stream, when another eye sees nothing. These are not the days in which a line of men four deep marches up to a similar line, and when both have discharged their weapons point-blank the line that remains the less thin marches through the other.

Weapons, we are told to-day, are too terrible for wars to continue. What an ironical thing is fact! Soon, if the Boers cannot be dislodged by the long range skirmishing imposed by modern weapons, we may really return to the practices of the terrible old days. If we attack with a sufficient number of men—how many Heaven only knows!—some must get through and be alive at the end of the day. Shall we emulate Grant in the American Civil War and launch a mass of men against a

mass of men, and disregard losses when we call the issue of the day a victory? We may come to that. But we have not yet.

Our own infantry, I say, were almost invisible. In Hart's brigade the York and Lancaster Regiment and the Lancashire Fusiliers—regiments just arrived at the front—were in the firing line. The Dublins and the Border Regiment were almost level with them. The lines indeed had become mixed and broken—but not broken in retreat. For the first time a change had come over our infantry: they dropped behind shelter with an inspiration caught from their enemies, watched their opportunities, and moved forward with a most notable combination of caution and dash. Their skill was not yet, of course, the skill of the enemy, and an advance, however skilful, has still to be made more or less openly. Men were dropping, but the ground gained was a fair return for the expenditure. To say that is to vindicate the tactics of the day. May the inspiration of our men on that Saturday grow!

Eye and intelligence alone are needed; the cheeriness, the quality of endurance, are fully there. I saw one man (in the enjoyment of one of those

trifling licenses which are permitted on active service) trudging happily to the firing line with a puppy under his arm. The *naïf* act was somehow characteristic, and I scarcely knew whether to think it amusing or pathetic. I wonder how the man and the dog spent that day. Did the dog return yapping at the heels of stretcher-bearers?

On our extreme left a headland ran out from the range of hills southward into the plain, and the mounted infantry were opposite the southern face of it. Bastion Hill it had been suitably named. "Go a little way up it. See what sort of place it is, and who is there. If it is strongly held come back, but if it is not, go on, take it, and hold it." That was the sense of the order given to Lord Dundonald. When an officer is told to go on if he can, he finds in most cases that he can; and that is just what Lord Dundonald did that day.

The South African Light Horse were told to go first. They dismounted and drew open like a fan into their line of advance. Now there was one man called Tobin—a sailor—and he sprang at the hill as though it were the familiar rigging of a ship. Up he went hand over hand, up an ascent like the slope of a bell-tent. Every one who watched held

his breath for the man to fall—not from the steepness, but from a bullet. Ten minutes before all the others he reached the top. There he stood against the sky and waved his helmet on his rifle. No Boer was there, and the hill in a few minutes was ours. “It was splendid to watch,” Lord Tullibardine said the next day. “It was a V.C. thing, and yet, if you know what I mean, it wasn’t.” Yes, I knew what he meant; but the absence of Boers made no jot of difference to the motive of Tobin. Shall we not invent a reward for acts of valour which turn out to have been misprompted?

If the top of Bastion Hill was empty, one of those accursed, unexpected ridges beyond it—they ought to be expected by this time at any rate—was not. When the Mounted Infantrymen sat down on the top of Bastion Hill the fusilade on them began. Major Childe — Childe-Pemberton he used to be—was soon killed. He was grey-headed, but this was the first day of his life in action. He had prophesied the night before that he would be killed. “If I am killed,” said he, “put this as my epitaph: ‘Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.’” And the sad pun was respected by his comrades; and on the simple

cross near Bastion Hill are cut the words, "Is it well with the child? It is well."

The Mounted Infantry held the hill till they were relieved. At the end of the day our infantry were lining a row of kopjes parallel with the Boer crests, but lower. A dip and a steep glacis, a thousand yards across, separated them from the Boers. Our loss in killed and wounded was some 400 men.

At dawn the next morning it was seen that in the night the Boers had abandoned a few trenches on their right. Our men were in them like a flash; and that was the last move we made forward till the capture of Spion Kop. We strained at the skyline, but it was not to be ours. The fighting settled into its last stage of invisibility. Our men, as well as the Boers, were in the rocks. The glacis ahead was still impossible. The battle was only audible. The guns and the musketry took it in turns to play the first part. As soon as the guns slackened their work, the snipping (for the shooting was all the premeditated shooting of marksmen) began from the Boer ridges. Up to a certain point of aggravation it was allowed to grow, and then from nearly all our batteries would come the

sudden bark of retaliation. Lyddite, fired from four howitzers with quite unexpected accuracy, knocked schantzes sideways. A Boer—on rare occasions two or three Boers—might be seen running away. But generally the lyddite and the shrapnel batted the enemy down in his works. He was quiet. Then our guns would become quiet too, and no sooner did that happen than the Boer marksmen would pop up again. Ping, ping, ping! round the very gunners who had scarcely had time to settle themselves behind the smoking guns. Bullets that missed the ridges could do nothing but drop over into the plain; the whole field was under fire.

For a good part of two days I sat in the works on Three Tree Hill. Some signallers were at work there. One stood, at one time, outside the shelter of the breastworks with his flag in his hand. An excellent target, the Boers seemed to think. The singing of a bullet came more frequently overhead, one or two struck the ground near. "Better mind where you stand," said another signaller. "I'm all right." And so you might have thought after you had seen the man stand exposed there for hours, but at last he had exhausted his chances

and he fell. He was only hit in the foot, but he spun round before he fell. Another signaller at the end of his spell of signalling dashed off to join his regiment in the firing line. "Where am I going?" he said, "Going to give 'em a 'undred and fifty of the best. That's for my pal who was killed at Willow Grange"—his friend, one of the West Yorks, had been killed on that infernal shoulder of Brynbella—" *'e would* stay to 'ave a few more and then 'e got it in the 'ead."

The work of the stretcher-bearers on all these days deserves a chorus to celebrate it. An oddly assorted body of men, many of whom have come to the front expecting to perform ordinary labour for ordinary wages, find themselves drilled under an imperial officer and, at the command, flung into the firing line to pick up the wounded! The private soldier may be cool, but he could not be cooler than "the body-snatcher," as the camp is pleased to call the bearer. I have seen one snatcher hurrying over the rocks in a pair of absurd canvas shoes, another in yawning boots and clothes that must have seen service in the streets of a town. Well, if the quality of heroism be measured by its unexpectedness, or the unsuit-

ability of the means, the essence of it is yours, body-snatchers! How many of you, I wonder, have had your own bodies snatched by the fate from which you went to rescue others? A good many, I know, but people do not consult the casualty lists anxiously for your names.

When fighting is after the manner I have described you can drift in and out of it imperceptibly. Only the piping song of a bullet tells you that you have come within the zone of fire; you can no more see the enemy than you could when you stood on the quiet veldt miles away. This green hill is under fire, that green hill is not; but both have the same innocent appearance, and perhaps the cattle are feeding on both. The stream of war has eddies; and you may be carried in a few moments from the pitifullest scenes to a grove quiet and shady, where the yellow apricots hang like lamps under the trees, and where you are inclined to think that such a thing as war never happened. Even in the firing line the elements of battle may be found elusive.

"What did you throw that stone at me for?" cried a soldier to a man next him on one of these days.

"I didn't throw it," was the answer.

"You did."

"I didn't throw anything."

"Liar!"

The men were ready to fly at one another when—what was that on the khaki uniform of the first man, beginning to show through, red and sodden?

"You're hit, man!" said the other.

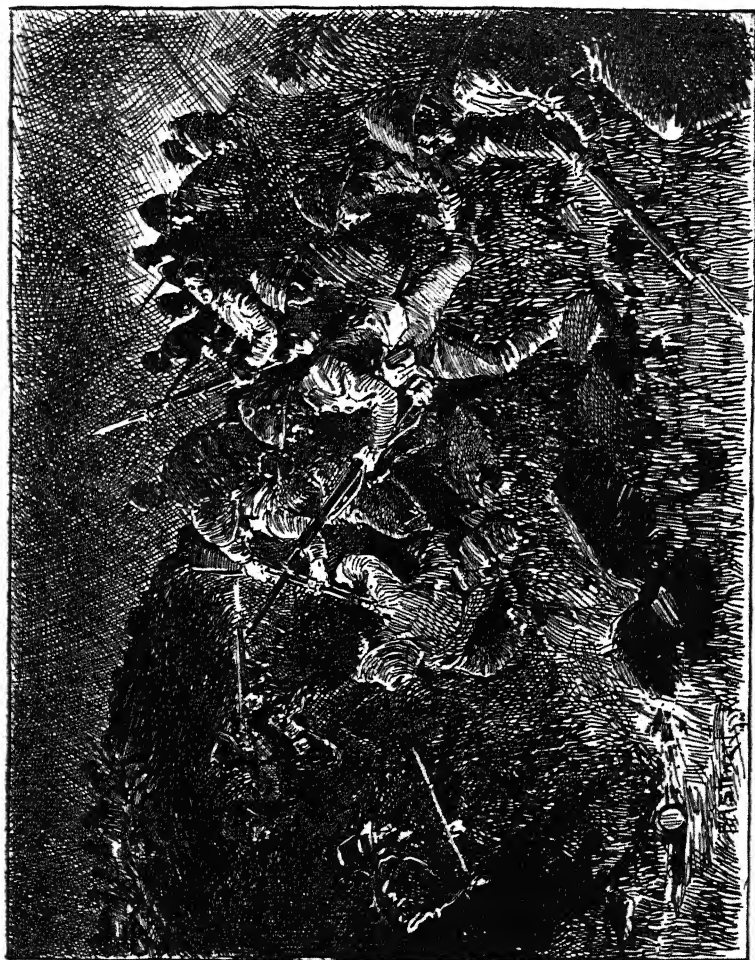
And of course it was quite true.

On the evening of Tuesday, January 23rd, it was clear that we could get no further with the frontal attack. Sir Charles Warren had all the time had Spion Kop, of which the general direction is north and south, in his eye as likely to be useful. If we could get on to the southern crest of it we could probably push on to the northern end, and once there we could open a flanking fire on the Boer lines which ran east and west. Spion Kop, properly used, was the key of the position, and the key that would open the door of Ladysmith. Patrols had reported that there were only a few Boers on it. Therefore Sir Charles Warren presented his scheme for capturing it, and it was accepted by Sir

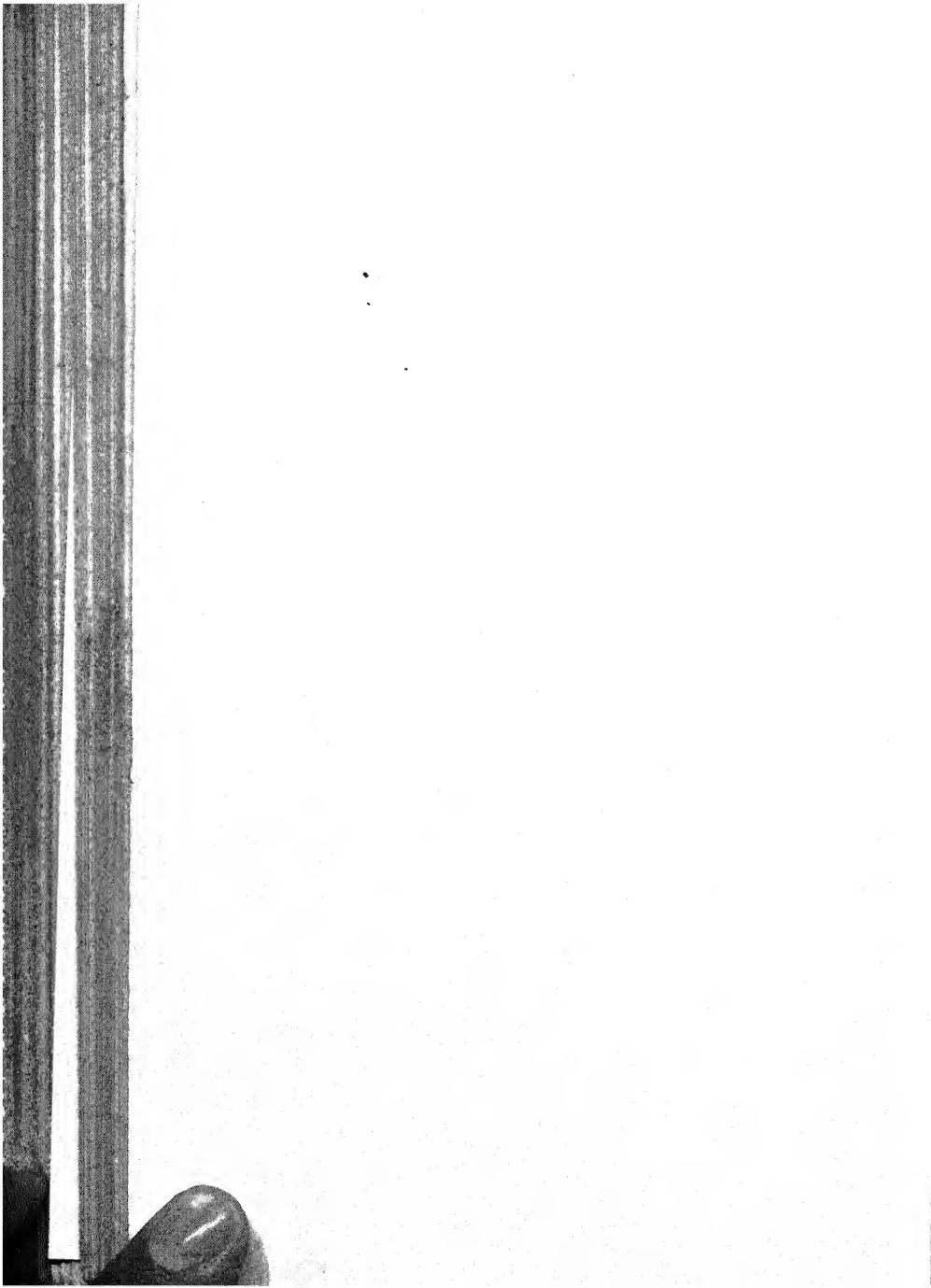
Redvers Buller when it had been all but decided to bring the whole left wing back to Potgieter's.

Soon after dusk on Tuesday a party set out to make a night attack on the hill. These were Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, the Lancashire Fusiliers, the Lancaster Regiment, two companies of the South Lancashire Regiment, and a company of Engineers ; General Woodgate commander. It was a hand-and-knee march up the southern face—a climb over smooth rock and grass. It was necessarily slow ; it is to the great credit of the party that it was steady. The force was three-quarters of the way up before it was discovered. Then a Boer sentry challenged it for the password. "Waterloo!" said an officer. The sentry turned to flee, but fell bayoneted where he turned.

Thorneycroft's were on the left, the Lancashire Fusiliers on the right of the front line. "Fire and charge!" came the order. The Fusiliers went forward at the deliberate conventional trot ; Thorneycroft's, with the untrained, admirable enthusiasm of volunteers, rushed forward in a frenzy. Only a picket was behind the sentry, and it vanished. But the crest was not reached till dawn. Colley made scarcely a longer or steeper



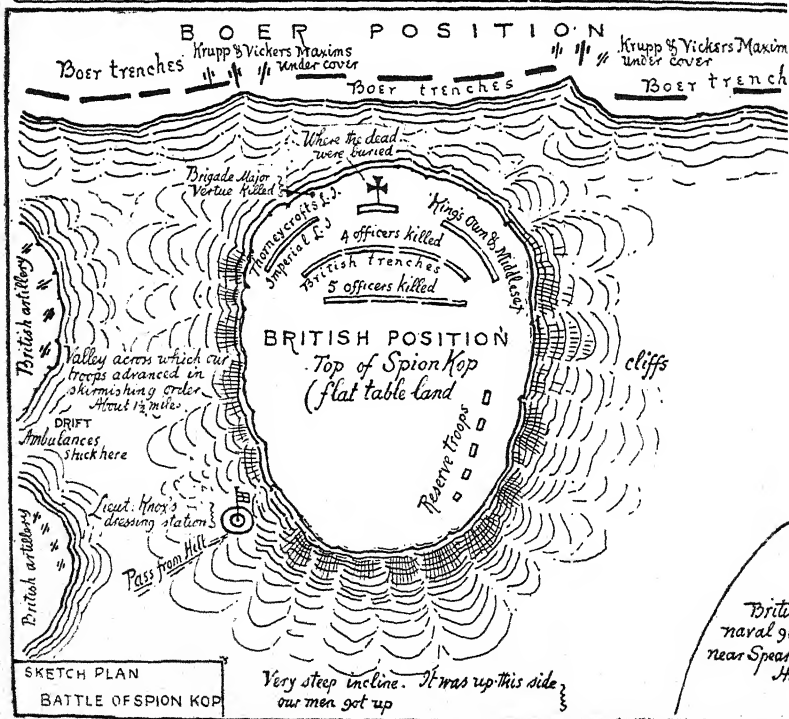
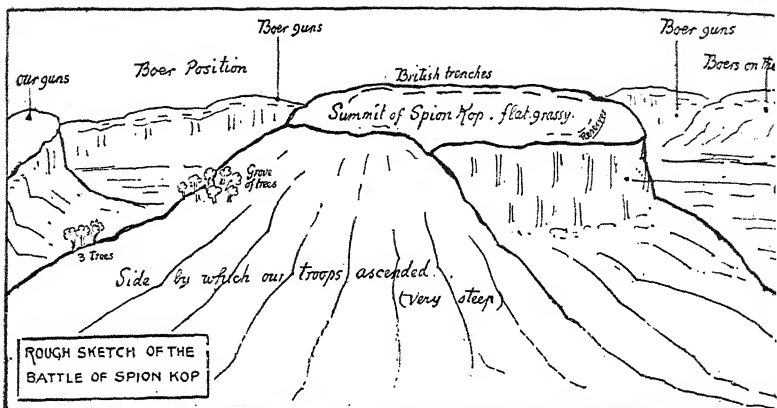
THE NIGHT ATTACK ON SHON KOP



march up Majuba. When dawn came the party found that it was in the clouds. It could see nothing but the plateau—400 yards across—on which it stood. Trenches were made, but it was difficult to determine the right place for them. The Boers were invisible; our own troops below were invisible; for three hours the party lived on a fog-bound island in the air. At last the mist lifted.

The curtain rose upon the performance of a tragedy. The Boers—need I say on another ridge of Spion Kop?—began to fire heavily, and our men seemed to have no sufficient protection in the trenches. The space was small; they were crowded together. I will describe the scene as I saw it from below. I shall always have it in my memory—that acre of massacre, that complete shambles, at the top of a rich green gully with cool granite walls (a way fit to lead to heaven) which reached up the western flank of the mountain. To me it seemed that our men were all in a small square patch; there were brown men and browner trenches, the whole like an over-ripe barley-field. As I looked soon after the mist had risen (it was nine o'clock, I think) I saw three shells strike a

certain trench within a minute ; each struck it full in the face, and the brown dust rose and drifted away with the white smoke. The trench was toothed against the sky like a saw—made, I supposed, of sharp rocks built into a rampart. Another shell struck it, and then—heavens !—the trench rose up and moved forward. The trench was men ; the teeth against the sky were men. They ran forward bending their bodies into a curve, as men do when they run under a heavy fire ; they looked like a cornfield with a heavy wind sweeping over it from behind. On the left front of the trenches they dropped into some grey rocks where they could fire. It is wonderful to see a man drop quickly for shelter when he has to ; his body might be made of paste, and for the first time in his life he can splash down in an amorphous heap behind a rock. Spout after spout of dust bounced up from the brown patch. So it would go on for perhaps half an hour, when the whole patch itself bristled up from flatness ; another lot of men was making for the rocks ahead. They flickered up, fledted rapidly and silently across the sky, and flickered down into the rocks without the appearance of either a substantial beginning or end to the movement. The sight was as elusive as a shadow show.



The Boers had three guns playing like hoses on our men. On the west of the hill they were firing a Vickers-Maxim, in the middle a large Creusot gun, on the east of the hill another Vickers-Maxim. It was a triangular fire. Our men on Spion Kop had no gun. When on earth would the artillery come? Guns were the only thing that could make the hill either tenable or useful. When on earth would they come? No sign of them yet, not even a sign of a mountain battery, and we who watched wriggled in our anxiety. The question now was whether enough men could live through the shelling till the guns came.

Men must have felt that they had lived a long life under that fire by the end of the day, and still the guns had not come. From Three Tree Hill the gunners shelled the usual places, as well as the northern ridges of Spion Kop, where the Boer riflemen were supposed to be. Where the Boer guns were we did not know. If only they had offered a fine mark like our own guns we should have smashed them in five minutes.

The British gunner is proud of the perfect alignment and the regular intervals which his battery has observed under the heaviest fire ;

the Boer gunner would be sorry to observe any line or any intervals. He will not have a gun in the open; he is not proud, but he is safe. You might say that in this war the object of the Boer gunners is to kill an enemy who cannot see them; that of the heroic British gunners is to be killed by an enemy whom they cannot see. The European notion of field guns is that they should be light enough to be moved about rapidly in battle and not hamper the speed of an army on the march. Now does it not appear that the Boers will change all that for us? They have dragged heavy, long-range guns about with them and put them on the tops of steep hills, and we, of all people, know that they have not hampered the speed of their army. Some dunderhead, perhaps, proposed that such guns should be taken by the army into the field—some fellow who had never read a civilised book on gunnery. But how many fools in history have led the world? Let us make ourselves wise men by adding another to the list.

Reinforcements were ordered to Spion Kop. They were needed. The men on Spion Kop were crying out for them. I could see men running to and fro on the top, ever hunted to a fresh shelter.

Some Boer riflemen crept forward, and for a few minutes fifty Boers and British heaved and swayed hand to hand. They drew apart. The shelling did not cease. The hollow rapping of the Vickers-Maxims was a horrid sound; the little shells from them flapped and clacked along the ground in a long, straight line like a string of geese. But the reinforcements were coming; already a thin line corkscrewed up the southern slope of Spion Kop. Their bayonets reflected the sun. Mules were in the column with ammunition, screwing themselves upwards as lithe as monkeys. The Dorsets, Bethune's, the Middlesex, the Imperial Light Infantry—volunteers destined to receive a scalding baptism—were on the climb.

From left to right of the field, too, from west to east, infantry moved. Hildyard's Brigade and the Somersets emerged from behind Three Tree Hill in open order, and moved towards the Boer line on the north and towards the west flank of Spion Kop. The Boers snipped into them. A man was down—a shot rabbit in the grass with his legs moving. The infantry went a little way further north and east, halted and watched Spion Kop the rest of the day.

General Woodgate had been mortally wounded about ten o'clock in the morning ; the command came by a natural devolution to Colonel Thorneycroft, and this big, powerful man, certainly the best mark on the hill, moved about fearlessly all day and was untouched. The reinforcements poured up the steep path, which bent over suddenly on to the plateau at the top. It was ten steps from shelter to death. The Scottish Fusiliers came over the east side of the hill from Potgieter's. The men were packed on to the narrow table under the sky ; some were heard to say that they would willingly go forward or go back, but that they could not stay where they were. But no order was given to go forward. If there were few orders it was because the officers had dwindled away. In the Lancashire Fusiliers only three officers were unwounded ; in Thorneycroft's eleven were hit out of eighteen. Of Thorneycroft's men only about sixty came down unwounded out of 190.

Late in the afternoon the 3rd Battalion of the King's Royal Rifles advanced up the eastern slope of Spion Kop from Potgieter's and seized two precipitous humps. The left half-battalion took

the left hump, the right half the right hump. Never was anything more regular, and seldom more arduous. One hundred men were lost in the brief advance. I did not see it, and I am told I missed the most splendid thing that day. English people are fond of praising, with a paradoxical generosity, the deeds of Irish and Scottish regiments. Here is a case for praise, without affectation, of an English regiment.

Night fell, and still no guns. The shell fire continued and the snipping. The Boers still had the range. At eight o'clock Colonel Thorneycroft decided to retire. We were to give up the key of the position and the key to Ladysmith—and no one will ever be able to find anything but praise for what Colonel Thorneycroft did that day. He had been sitting on a target for thirteen hours, and now he was going. It was necessary. Some men had fought there for twenty-one hours without water. In England the physical proof of what that means is lacking. The mountain battery was already up; two naval twelve-pounders were half-way up. But Thorneycroft was going now. It was necessary.

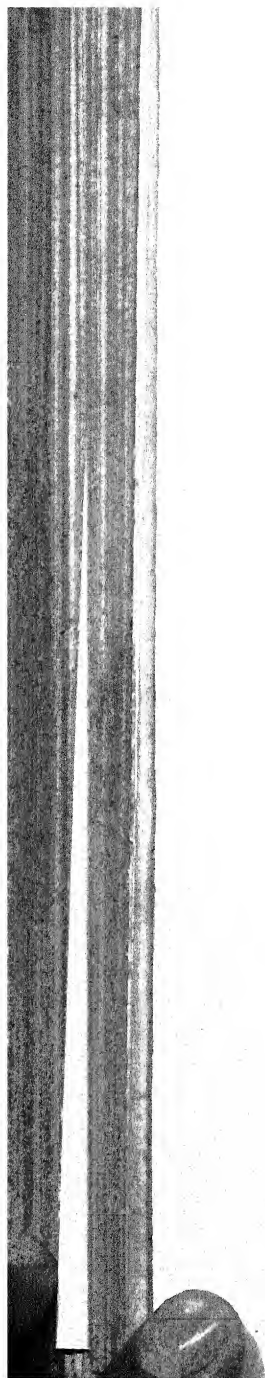
When dawn came the officer in command of

the naval guns on Mount Alice looked through the long telescope. He looked long before he answered some one who asked how our men were on Spion Kop. "They are all Boers and Red Cross men there," he said. That was the first we, who had slept at Potgieter's, knew of the retirement; it was the first the Headquarters Staff knew of it. In a few hours Warren's force was coming back across the Tugela. "The way round" had failed.

No, let me say one of the ways round had failed; another must be found. It seems now that wherever we go our way must be through hills; yet many more attempts must be made to overcome the heavy restrictions which modern warfare imposes upon a force attacking hills, many more sacrifices must be made to the inexorable before Ladysmith can be abandoned without disgrace. Sir Charles Warren made his retirement memorable for speed and orderliness. The last group was crossing the river early on Friday morning when a Boer shell plumped into the river. It was a signal of success, but Sir Redvers Buller, who stood by, would have watched anything else in the world with the same impas-



7
AFTER THE FIRST DAY'S FIGHTING AT SPION KOP RANGE: DOCTORS BEGINNING THEIR ALL NIGHT'S WORK



sivity. We had lost 1,500 odd men in the week's fighting.

A doctor told me of the scene on Spion Kop on Thursday morning. A great proportion of the wounds had been made by shells, therefore they must not be described. A Boer doctor looked at the dead bodies of men and horses, the litter, the burnt grass where shells had set fire to it, at the whole sad and splendid scene where the finest infantry in the world had suffered, "No!" he said, with double truth, "we Boers would not, could not suffer like that."

CHAPTER XIII

WE ATTACK VAAL KRANTZ, AND FAIL AGAIN.

SPRINGFIELD, *Friday, February 9th, 1900.*

AGAIN the troops prepared for battle. For more than a week they had lived in tents, slept their fill, and tasted fresh meat. It was now Sunday, February 4th, and all through the hot, slow, sleepy, silent afternoon two caterpillars of infantry, scarce distinguishable from the hillsides—two brigades they proved to be on a closer view—crawled along the line of the hills to the east of Spearman's Farm.

Warren's operations west of Potgieter's Drift had failed: very well, that did not shut out success, and we would now try if we could not fit a key into those desperately locked hills somewhere on the east. In that sleepful week just passed Sir Redvers Buller himself had said that

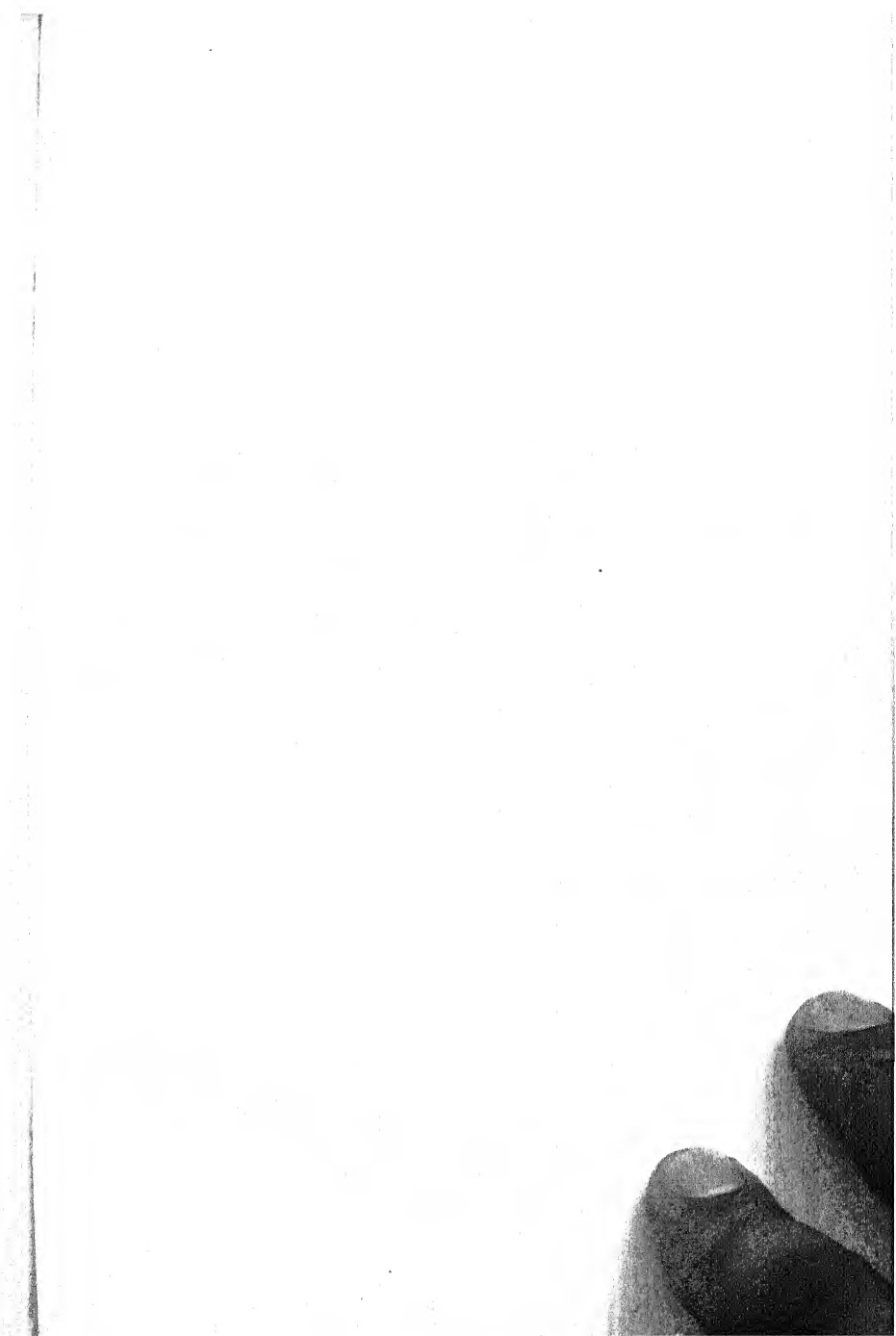
the key was found. None had it in his heart to doubt it. Do not suppose that the troops thought of defeat; the daily signals from Ladysmith were an intolerable incentive; the sound of guns, and the knowledge that sickness struck its roots deeper every day into the splendid garrison smothered the memory of Colenso and Spion Kop. On Saturday night I had been at a concert given by the South African Light Horse in the flare of bonfires on the open veldt, and then Colonel Byng and "Bimbashi" Stewart had vowed in speeches that they would do their best to lead their men to Ladysmith, and the men had sworn that they had only to be led to follow. Not a man but felt, and feels, that Ladysmith must be helped; its need overcomes all the considerations of modern warfare which forbid us to assault the hills of Northern Natal. You cannot see a man drown and refuse to help him; or if you can you are not a soldier but one worthy of the censure of coroners.

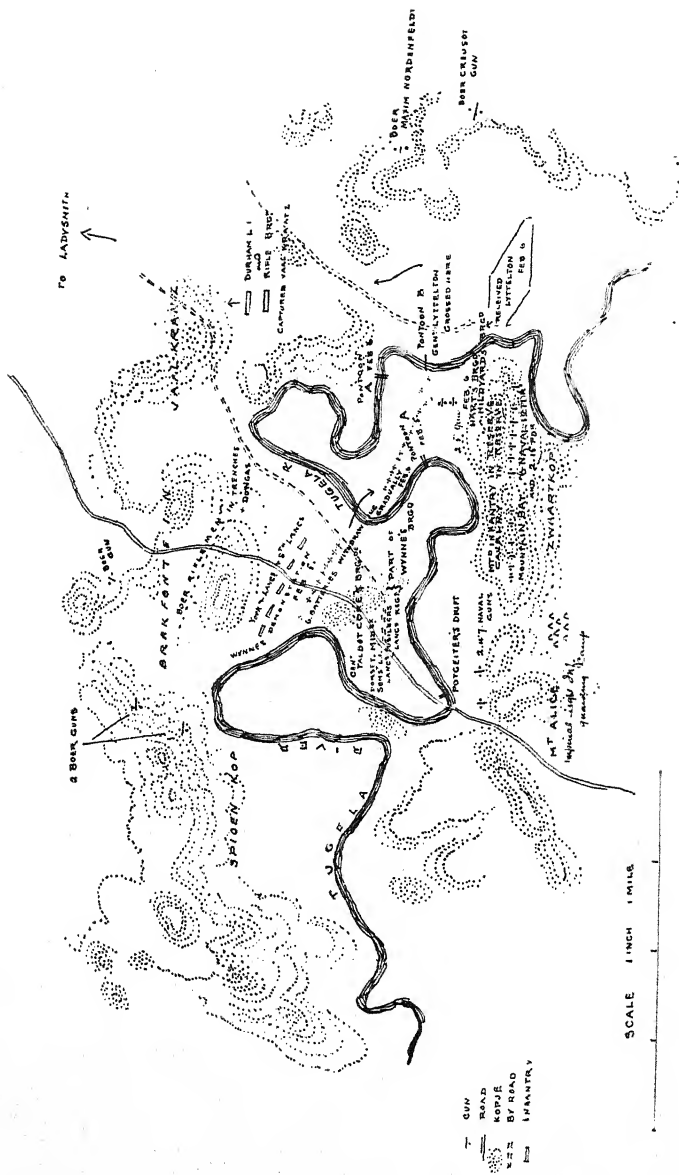
The brigades of Generals Hildyard and Hart were moving to our right. They bivouacked in front of Swaart Kop, a dark wooded hill south of the Tugela and opposite Vaal Krantz. Vaal

Krantz hill was at the east end of the main Boer position. It was there that the strength of the riflemen tailed off to its finish, and it was there that we hoped to open the door to Ladysmith.

The ascent to Swaart Kop at the back is almost like a ladder placed against a house. Guns had been hauled up on to the plateau—a pleasant grass plat, fit to play cricket on, placed, characteristically of South Africa, on precipitous walls. How the guns reached the top is the sailors' secret. The naval gunners might be Boers for their skill in hauling guns on to half-impossible peaks. Mules rolled heels over head down that steep path, but the guns went steadily up drawn by steel ropes; and when all were on the top I counted six naval twelve-pounders, a battery of six mountain guns, and two field fifteen-pounders. Lieut. Ogilvy, R.N., and Lieut. James, R.N., had their guns behind the heavy screen of cactus and mimosa, but the stems of the trees had been cut almost through and when the guns were needed on Monday sudden vistas crashed into existence before the muzzles of the guns.

The first gun was fired at seven o'clock on Monday morning. General Lyttelton's light





brigade had been withdrawn from the small kopjes just across the river near Potgieter's Drift and was replaced by the Lancashire brigade, now commanded by Colonel Wynne. General Talbot Coke's brigade was across the Tugela also in front of Mount Alice, except one regiment, the Imperial Light Infantry, which indifferently guarded the camp and watched the battle from the heights of Mount Alice. The plan was this. There was to be every appearance of a frontal attack on Brakfontein Hill opposite Mount Alice ; no less than six batteries were to move forward across the open ground ; but while the appearance of the attack was being sustained the batteries were to be withdrawn one by one and were to move to our right for the real attack on Vaal Krantz.

While the intermittent bark of guns was rising to a cannonade there were Mounted Infantry behind Mount Alice still saddling up or moving off to our all-important right at the walk. You might expect the sound of guns, mounting to a climax, to sting every one into instant furious action. I have seldom seen anything that appeared so cool and slow as the squadrons walking

off behind Mount Alice. While the guns are booming can one ever come readily to believe how slowly battles develop?

The river lies in the valley like the folds of a serpent. General Lyttelton was now moving to our right—it was he who was to assault Vaal Krantz—and he had to cross the river twice. For his first crossing the bridge was made, for the second the bridge was in the making, and five sappers were wounded before that half-hour's job was finished. The whole army below me moved, stretching out its limbs like a huge waking beast. General Hildyard and General Hart, who were to support the assault, were already crouched in potent waiting in front of Swaart Kop.

Now the delusive infantry—the York and Lancaster Regiment and the South Lancashires—were advancing in the open towards Brakfontein. Round the guns the long thin lines split and joined together again in front and went on. Here and there the lines were thick, where the men had not yet had room to extend. Officers blew their whistles and threw their arms apart and the knotted part of the line moved crabwise until the proper intervals were observed. And

so the two battalions moved on and then the guns moved on too ; and at last they moved on so far that the Boer gunners made up their minds that it really was an attack, or if not—and of course they are used to demonstrations—that at least it was something worth firing at.

The first line of the six batteries had been shelling everything that presented itself to the minds of the gunners. That is the way of feinters. The air was burdened with rushing and whistling sounds ; here a vapour of brown dust floated along the hills where a shell had ploughed up the earth ; there a huge white Prince of Wales's feather of smoke sailed up from a farmhouse compound. Then, suddenly, a great pillar rose out in the solid earth in front of our guns, and the whine of the shell passing through the air rose up to Mount Alice long after the explosion was over. Rare occasion ! The fire of the Boers had been drawn when it was wanted.

Moving off to our right as quickly as infantry can move was Lyttelton's column, with a gap in its back where it dropped down to the first pontoon bridge across the river. Now it was all-important that it should hurry on without

being noticed. Already the first battery of those before Brakfontein had come quietly away and was stealing along behind Lyttelton's infantry. It was after ten o'clock.

I turned again to the batteries in action. Another pillar flew up from the earth. It was closer to the guns. One caught at one's breath, for the next shell surely must fall right on them. As for the guns themselves they barked more furiously than ever. Two and three shells at once sang and ground through the air, flashed into life out of invisibility on the opposite hills or tore through the red-brown earth of the trenches. A third pillar bounced up from the open ground. But this time it was behind our guns; and the gunners were all the time bending over the guns, aiming, loading, firing, lifting things out of boxes, like busy waiters at a crowded supper. A three-inch Boer gun was firing from Spion Kop. And now there came from the east of Brakfontein the hateful hollow sound of the Vickers-Maxim—pom-pom-pom-pom-pom—and the little shells fell and spluttered along the ground in a string. They seemed to rake the whole line of the 78th Battery. Our howitzers behind the field guns

began to fire : out went the shell from the thick-necked barrel with little more than the sound of a rocket, and the twelve pounds of lyddite exploded on the opposite ridge with a clap like thunder. A third gun opened on our batteries. At once little squirts of dust were threshed up all round the 78th Battery, just as when the first few drops of a heavy storm are flung upon a pond. Afterwards came the peculiar unmistakable wail. It was shrapnel. I saw the gunners through a drifting cloud. Again and again the shells fell before, behind, between, and to right and left of the guns.

Presently a few gunners appeared more clearly. They were coming back. Three or four guns stood deserted. The rest were worked as busily as ever. Behind all the batteries, under the shelter of a slight ridge, horses and limbers were wheeling into a formation. They were going to bring home the guns. Forward they went, six teams in a perfect row, galloping towards the imperilled treasures in the open veldt. Was there ever anything finer than British gunnery or so extravagantly dangerous?

I could see an officer at the guns waiting for the

rescue. He sat stock-still on his horse. His hand went continually up to his mouth and dropped away again. He might have been taking snuff or pulling his moustache. Perhaps it was the action of nervousness ; but nothing ever looked cooler. The six teams passed in front of the first row of guns, wheeled round like horses driven on the curve of a drive, and pulled up at the guns. Men were busily twitching and hauling at the couplings. Again the shrapnel dust flew up from the ground and a large shell fell between two teams. And then, after an æon, as it seemed, the six teams galloped back with the six guns. A couple of officers were hit—the foot of one was gone—and a few horses and two or three men were wounded. You could scarcely believe that this miracle of immunity to the majority had happened.

The first line of guns was back and under shelter. The shells began to fall among what had been the second line. The Boers, it seemed, would deal with everything in turn. But soon these guns too had been brought home and the batteries were safe ; the first had already trotted unostentatiously away to the right. Only the turn of the infantry remained.

The two battalions might not have existed all this time ; they lay flat and were part of the veldt. But now whistles blew and up they rose. Where there had been nothing there was now row upon row of dotted lines, black in the bright sunlight. They moved away from Brakfontein, and on the signal a splutter of musketry burst forth from invisible riflemen and instantly swelled into a continuous roar. It came after a moment's silence, and was like the burst and swell of clapping hands in a theatre. The infantry, hunted home by bullets, came back ; the operation was over ; the casualties were barely fifty ; seldom was a feint more engrossing—to the enemy.

I was on Swaart Kop when the bombardment of Vaal Krantz was at its highest. Hildyard's and Hart's brigades lay below me ready for everything. Lyttelton's brigade was half across the newly-built bridge. The Durham Light Infantry lay under the sheer river bank on the other side. In a few minutes they were to advance north along the river to Vaal Krantz. The most easterly ridge of Vaal Krantz stood obscure in dust and smoke. Above all were the little white airy buttons of smoke from bursting shrapnel. Nothing, one thought, could live under that bombardment.

The time was ripe. A handful of skirmishers from the Durhams climbed up the bank and ran into a mealie field, their bodies curved crescent-shape as they ran. They dropped among the mealies. All shot? No, there they were, firing. Up again in a minute, on they went. Now some were out in the open beyond the mealie field. Two men collapsed behind ant-heaps; then one rose up and ran back to the field. More men—a whole company—came out from the river bank. The first skirmishers made room for them by spreading out into the open to the right of the mealies. Down these men went behind ant-heaps. Surely that man there was hit? No, he was firing again. Ah, but that other man had fallen limply right in the open. Now he was crawling on his belly to an ant-heap. He was wounded. Another man was helping him. From a cob-web of dongas below Doornkloof Mountain the Boers were sending in a harassing cross-fire; also from a donga in front to the east of Vaal Krantz; also from the walls round a homestead. Half a battalion was out from the river bank now, and the wounded were unmistakable where they lay. Major Johnson-Smyth was shot dead.

The mountain battery on Swaart Kop was firing into a donga at three thousand yards. Ridiculously disproportionate columns of white smoke curled up from the baby guns. The gunners, after the fashion of mountain gunners, knelt beside the kicking infants, the firer drew tight the lanyard and cut the side of his hand fiercely down upon it; back flew the gun through the avenue of four kneeling men, tilted up on one wheel, threatening to overturn; and then the gunners slapped it back into equilibrium and its former position. Wherever the Boer fire was coming from, the riflemen were invisible. But the tendency of the enemy was plain; on the plateau behind his hills horsemen and waggons moved to the east. The Boers meant to make themselves strong on Doornkloof. If they succeeded they would send every sort of fire on our right flank. And how could we stop it? Only by storming the mountain and suffering a horrible loss that would bear no relation to the achievement.

The Boers did succeed.

Vaal Krantz was a profitless capture. First, it stood in front of the main line of Boer hills and so did not enable us to open a flanking fire at all—a

fact which might have been discovered long before from any reputable survey-map had one existed ; secondly, it was soon flanked itself from Doornkloof.

On Swaart Kop it was necessary to stand close by the guns to see through the vistas in the bushes. The noise was deafening. At one's ear was the voice of the artillery officer : " Number two gun—fire ! " " Number three gun—fire ! " " Number four gun—fire ! " From the map of country stretched below there floated up the voice of the infantry officer, " Fire ! " Cr—r—r—r—r—mp ! The infantrymen lying on their stomachs on this side of the river had fired a volley. Tat—tat—tat—tat—tat—tat—tat ! four Maxims were stuttering at once, and their utterance was punctuated with the heavier, slower tapping of the Colt guns. The Durhams were already on the lower slopes of Vaal Krantz ; the Rifle Brigade strained at their heels ; the infantry multiplied behind ; the mealie fields filled with brown figures ; a man lay behind every ant-heap ; the bearers and the doctors stooped over limp, huddled figures.

It was about three o'clock when a Boer gun dashed out from behind Vaal Krantz towards

Doornkloof. It was drawn by six horses, an officer rode in front, another behind. There was no guard. Never before was a Boer gun exposed in the open like this! Every eye seized it, every gun turned upon it; the hunting field never heard such an outcry. The gun could easily have been taken in safety further behind Vaal Krantz, but the gunners wanted to reach a particular green kopje nearer our infantry. They risked it, and dashed for it.

It was magnificent! A single horse down and the whole equipage must have been smashed into a dust-heap. Three shells fell at once near the gun. It bounced on at the gallop like a sledge over the rough ground. The shells crept nearer to it. One more shell and the gun would be no more—or so we thought, and the thought was hardly there when the shells fell wide. A donga lay in front of the gun; it was making for that. In twenty seconds it would be there. It reached the edge of the donga; it was checked and stood still while the horses pawed their way down the rough dip. Now for it! One more chance! One more shell! The earth and smoke flew up; the shell was wide. The gun had disappeared. It

had gone to earth. It deserved to be there. I found that I was breathless.

A few minutes before four o'clock Vaal Krantz was ours. The first man had reached the top, he was walking cautiously across it, and, as he looked about him, his bayonet flickered like a fire-fly. Soon the brigade was resting on the side of the hill. But all the hill was under fire from west and north and east. To the west at least the Boer riflemen must be driven back along the ridges.

A battery of horse artillery whirled across the open from below Swaart Kop. Field artillery goes in a fine tumult, and has many adventitious aids to an exhilarating clatter. At the gallop the gunners on the carriage cling like limpets. But for sheer speed you must see horse artillery ; every horse is ridden and spurred, the dangling gun with nobody on it to hold on for his life, bangs and leaps over the ground. Horse artillery is a whirlwind. This battery that galloped across to the river west of Vaal Krantz, wheeled twice as it went, swooping to its position with the eye of a bird. It was just as when gulls swing together in the air : first you have the paper-edge of the wing, then a twinkle in the air, and out of exiguity sails



CAPTURE OF VAAL KRANTZ BY THE DURHAM LIGHT INFANTRY

the broadside of the whole line. The horse battery shelled the ridges sedulously, and the Durhams advanced perhaps half a mile along the hog's-back of the captured kopje. Night fell. The sound of musketry had not died at nine o'clock.

On Tuesday morning Vaal Krantz appeared seamed with trenches. Shells came with the dawn. The brigade was protected by all the means that mind and limb had been able to devise and build during the night. But the "pom-pom" shells strung along the flat top of the hill. Perhaps they did little harm, and they are very small, but that long, grasping flutter of grey smoke is most horrible to see. Now, could we hold this hill, or was it to be another Spion Kop? All day the sound of musketry played in significant cadences; shells fell visibly among our trenches, and our gunners, heroically exposed in the open but ignored in favour of better prey, bombarded invisible guns.

A pontoon bridge was thrown across the Tugela at the foot of Vaal Krantz. It was well enough for the infantry to dash across, but how could the cumbersome transport of our army move across that open land while the guns on Doornkloof were

not silenced? And if they could not, how should our capture serve any good purpose?

About four o'clock on Tuesday afternoon the Boers attacked our front trenches from the west. A heavy burst of rifle fire, and our surprised infantry were tumbling back along the ridge. A couple of hundred yards back they stopped, rallied, and faced the enemy; hundreds of heads bobbed up where the bullets were topping the curve of the hill; the 60th Rifles were going to the rescue.

Again the fire-flies glimmered along the top of the hill; they stopped; the sound of musketry grew; they were up again and flitting on; finally they flashed straight and full and strong at the trenches, and the old positions were ours again. It was all over in less than an hour. We had beaten off an attack, but still we had made no advance. At dusk General Hildyard's brigade relieved General Lyttelton's.

On Wednesday morning Vaal Krantz appeared ribbed and slashed with even more trenches; traverses and headcovers had been built in the night. General Hildyard and Prince Christian Victor had not slept. *Now* should we hold the place?

A large Creusot gun on the top of Doornkloof was dropping 100 lb. shells here and there all over the field with graceful impartiality. One fell among the waiting infantry in front of Swaart Kop. "Scatter!" cried an officer, and soon all the battalions were hiding in the rich wood which clothes the side of Swaart Kop. One fell among the Mounted Infantry, and men and horses drew behind a hump of ground. One fell near the balloon which was leaping to escape the hands of the balloon section. One fell among the artillery horses which were grouped away behind the guns; the smoke cleared, and, behold, the horses stood unmoved and only a Kaffir driver and a bullock lay on the ground. A quarter of an hour later a happy opportunist passed me on the slope of Swaart Kop with a rib of beef in his hands.

Twenty guns were firing at the hundred-pounder. It used black powder, and the shaft of white smoke that it belched up out of its mouth would not have done discredit to the whole of our mountain battery. The ground near it smoked like a lime kiln from our shells, but the gun itself smoked away too, with no hitch in its regularity. "There it is; it's up again!" was the cry, for the gun was

on a disappearing carriage. Its barrel, plain against the sky, vacillated till it settled on its object. "It's pointing this way!" The white cloud spouted forth. Those who liked lay behind rocks, but in any case in the quarter of a minute during which you waited for the shell were some of the strangest moments of anticipation in a man's life. The gun rose from its den, pointed, fired, and disappeared in twelve seconds. Our shells from the nearest guns took eighteen seconds to reach it, so that they were always six seconds too late. Night fell, and still no advance had been made. Our casualties in the three days' fighting were nearly 400.

That night several corps of Mounted Infantry and some guns passed my tent on the road to Spearman's Farm. "A reconnaissance," some one said, "to see if the Boers are still holding their right." But I woke in the night, and the tramping and grinding were still on the road. Day and the truth dawned together. We were retiring. And where lay the fault? Not with the infantry—they will go anywhere with a cheer; scarcely with Sir Redvers Buller who was severe with himself and honest with the army and the nation when

he gave the order. The fault of this and of all other battles was the cumbrous nature of our transport. How should it be otherwise than that jam and pickles should be at a disadvantage against biltong?

CHAPTER XIV

THE "FIGHTING MARCH" ON MONTE CHRISTO

COLENZO, *Thursday, February 22nd, 1900.*

SUCCESS is comparatively dull. Here were we making a fighting march along the range of Monte Christo, flanking the enemy, taking him at a complete tactical disadvantage, making his whole line bulge and crumple because we were pushing hard on it at one end, and yet there was never a moment when one was thrilled as by the impotent heroism of Colenso, Spion Kop, or Vaal Krantz. Your own successes in war may be dull to watch; it is not dull indeed to your heart, but warming and genial, if your heart has been frozen, and sickened with failure. The fighting march, as I may call the battle of Monte Christo, was dull to see because it was gradual, the events

of a day seemed trifling, and the fighting was more than half invisible. But the accumulated events made it the best achievement so far of Sir Redvers Buller's column.

And what a pleasant irony was success here and now! A month before we had left this place—these close-tangled, knotted hills—to find a way round. We were back here with our knowledge of geography strengthened. There was no way round. These hills from Colenso westwards are a spur of the Drakensberg mountains. East of Colenso the country, if dissimilar, is no better. What then was to be done?

The honourable obligations under which we were laid to help Ladysmith were not dissipated in proportion as the military enormity of attacking these hills became clearer. Quite the reverse. What on earth, then, was to be done? We had seen the outlying camps round Ladysmith; we had been in frequent communication with the garrison; we had read their tales of bad water, of horse and mule to eat, and of the ever-growing sickness; we could never forget the laconic splendid message as far back as January 6th: "Hard pressed."

Reason said, nevertheless, "Leave these hills ; do not fight for 8,000 men when you will lose more in saving them. Do not make sentiment superior to expediency. Scatter your forces no longer. Concentrate a great army in the Free State, and go forward with all the strength of military wisdom at your back." Reason said all this ; but reason is less than impulse, or conscience, or faith, or hope, or charity, or, perhaps, even than madness.

No, no—none could think, after all, of sacrificing Ladysmith. How, then, was Ladysmith to be helped? I imagine that in this quandary Sir Redvers Buller argued thus: "There is no way round. Very well ; it matters little where I try to push through. All places are equally bad ; all attempts are equally desperate. In these circumstances, the best thing to do is to reduce my line of communication as much as possible. If I am forced to retreat, as I very well may be, I shall then have no difficulty that is purely unnecessary. In short I must return to the railway." At least the decision fits the argument. Back to Chieveley the relief column came. The 13th and 14th Hussars, the Royals, the York and

Lancaster Regiment and the Lancashire Fusiliers were detailed to watch our left at Springfield.

The army shot an arrow, so to speak, on to Hussar Hill. This place was to be ours, and then become the starting-point of new operations. It was called Hussar Hill because a few Hussars had been cut off there and killed while reconnoitring. It is necessary to describe the position. The hills at the back of Colenso—of which Grobler's Kloof is one—run roughly east and west. East of Grobler's Kloof a range falls away to the south at right angles to the hills behind Colenso. This range is on the south side of the Tugela, and Hlangwana and the hills called Monte Christo and Cingolo are part of it. Now the long low ridge of which Hussar Hill is part lies in the angle made by the Grobler's Kloof range and the Monte Christo range. The ridge runs parallel with the Monte Christo range, and is divided from it by a shallow valley; in other words it lies roughly north and south. The scheme was to take Hussar Hill, or to avoid confusion, I will say the long Hussar ridge, cross the shallow valley, march up Cingolo, and then move along the line of the range on to the enemy's flank.

On Monday, February 12th, some mounted infantry visited Hussar Hill, to find out more accurately what sort of place it was. The Boers were in the habit of visiting it every day. On this day they let the mounted infantry walk about on it while they themselves lay in a donga near by. Some infantry and field guns had come out with the mounted infantry, but seeing their comrades safely on to the place where they would be, they went home. At last the mounted infantry started for home too. Then the Boers rushed from the donga, boldly lined the top of the hill, and fired luxuriously into the departing force. The mounted infantry arranged their retirement judiciously—in succession of squadrons. Sir Bryan Leighton's squadron came last, accompanied by some Colt guns on Lord Dundonald's galloping carriages. The force came away with about a dozen casualties. Mr. Jack Churchill was hit in the leg. He had just arrived from England, and this was the first day's fighting he had seen. It seemed as though he had paid his brother's debts.

On Wednesday, February 14th, Lord Dundonald marched out early to Hussar Hill. A battery of Field Artillery, and the Irish Fusiliers followed

him. The Boers raced him for the hill. He won by about five minutes. The Boers were three-quarters of the way through the donga which runs from Hussar Hill to Hlangwana—a scraggy water-track, with a thick stem and arms struck out on either side, like a ruined feather. From this they fired on to the hill, and we ground back our answer from the Colt machines and tossed shrapnel down on the places where the gunners thought the Boers were likely to be. Hussar Hill was ours. Now to bring up the army.

For three days the hill was like a standing fly-wheel which winds everything up to it. The chief need was water, and to get water we must spread out. All Thursday and Friday we were edging crabwise along the ridge south-eastwards; little white bursting globes of smoke went first, probing the bush, teaching us the way; the mounted infantry came next, and the whole column was beckoned on, as by the white arms of a siren, by the silver band which was curved in the valley at the end of the ridge. That was the Blaauwkrantz; that was water.

It was slow work moving. The troops lay about for the greater part of the day, and craved water.

The sun was uncovered ; the heat was mordant. "We are just laying and drying up," I heard a soldier say in a phrase, I thought, of unapproachable descriptive quality. Meanwhile the Boers sat among the mimosas and in their elaborate sand-bagged trenches on Hlangwana, and on all the range between there and Monte Christo. On Hussar Hill we had, besides field guns, four naval twelve-pounders, two five-inch garrison guns, and a battery of howitzers. And the Boers shelled us with an invisible three-inch gun. No place on the hill was sheltered. The Boers must have been bewildered by the very number of targets. Sometimes they fired at the guns for a few minutes, then they would change to a group of battery horses, then to a filing line of infantry, then to a transport train. And we ! Why, on those rare occasions when we see a gun or a few Boers we are only for the moment relieved from the constant puzzle of having nothing to fire at.

On Saturday, February 17th, our bombardment waxed to a higher power. The naval gunners on Hussar Hill were splendidly protected by sand-bag works, and though they were shelled with precision lost no men. With one of the five-inch

garrison guns it was otherwise. They were not protected. Why not protected? "It's not our way," the army gunner says. Major Caldwell sat in a deck chair near the five-inch guns—the type of the cool, scornful British artillery officer—and kept saying, "Number one gun, fire." "Number two gun, fire!" while I talked with him about the battle of Domokos, which we had seen together in Greece. Earlier in the morning a shrapnel had burst among the detachments of one of these guns while they were staking out the gun, and of the six men not one escaped. One was killed, five were wounded. Our field guns were now on the east side of the Hussar ridge, hidden among the thorn bushes, poking their noses across the valley at the parallel range. The howitzers from behind the narrow ridge flung up their charges of lyddite. What a dull pursuit is that of the howitzer gunner, who has nothing but the blank side of a hill and a few sticks for his direction in front of him, and must fire all day as he is told, and see nothing for his pains.

From Monte Christo a buttress or spur runs out; it is a hill of smooth sides (when you see them from a distance) and rich green grass. Green Hill

it was named at once. Red dashes, when trenches had been cut into the red earth, were the lineaments of its smooth face. Under one's gaze the unwrinkled face grew disfigured and pock-marked with the bursting shells. Soon one end was alight, and the grass fire steadily ate its way forward under a constant breeze. But all this day never a Boer stirred on Green Hill that I could see.

That morning three brigades were at the foot of the Monte Christo range, already hidden in the thick thorn bushes that drape the hills. General Barton, with the Fusilier brigade, was on the left; Colonel Norcott, with the light brigade, in the middle; General Hildyard and the English brigade on the right. The South Lancashires and the Lancaster Regiment were on watch west of Hussar Hill. The Middlesex, Dorsets, and Somerset Light Infantry lined the Hussar ridge, and looked across the valley to Monte Christo. The three attacking brigades—Barton's, Norcott's, and Hildyard's—were right away south, in the mouth of the valley—far south of all the Boer entrenchments. They were to bore up the side of the hills as they marched, and by the time General Hildyard was on the sky-line the Boer

position would be outflanked. A long march is the price of a flanking success against a mobile enemy.

The brigades disappeared in the bushes; you could follow their progress only by finding a few men where the bushes opened or by the advance of the rattling. The Boers were probably firing from the bushes on Monte Christo.

It would be tedious, if it were possible, to describe all the details of this fighting march. The Welsh and Irish Fusiliers appeared at last in open mealie fields below Green Hill—first a handful and then whole companies running, scattered about, their bodies bent forward, falling down—hit? No, up again!—and so on, and on, and on, dropping and bobbing up again, while the Boer fire grew stronger and stronger. It had been swamped by our artillery, but now, as the gun fire slackened in front of our men, it grew and flourished, and spread even to Green Hill, on which (you could have sworn) there was not a living soul an hour before. And now the Fusiliers were coming back, and the Rifle Brigade and the Durhams and the Scottish Rifles and the 60th on the slopes of Cingolo, were trailing back too!

A reverse? No, it was only that General Hildyard was already on the top of Cingolo marching towards Monte Christo, and it was useless to press the untactical attacks below. Night fell. The Queen's, of Hildyard's Brigade, and some mounted infantry were already on the dip, or neck, which joins Cingolo to Monte Christo. They were black against the sky.

On Sunday morning the bombardment of Green Hill began all over again. On went the three brigades, marching and fighting blindly. The Fusiliers were at a higher level than yesterday. Green Hill was shelled till you would have thought it shaken to its base. Not a Boer stirred on it. In the bush north of it the Boer riflemen were still firing, but not strongly. They were meditating retreat; they were plainly fighting a rear-guard action. And now it was one o'clock, and the ensign of success appeared above the crest of Monte Christo. It was the first line of the Queen's.

The regiment had had to fight hard this morning along the neck and on the east side of Monte Christo. But here were the skirmishers. The Boers saw them, you may believe, sooner than

any one did on our side. The Boer firing dwindled more. Of what use were their trenches on the face of Green Hill now, built tier upon tier, and reaching back from one position to another, all built against a frontal attack with an unassailable conviction of the stupidity of the British army? The Queen's skirmishers ran out from the bush on the crest of Monte Christo on to a patch of open grass. A wisp of smoke blew out in the air below them. Shrapnel was creeping up the hill. Now it came higher. A third—it was right over the men,—and the dust danced on the ground. The men snatched up stones lying about them, and in a moment they were lying behind miserably insignificant ramparts. Another shrapnel puffed into white smoke overhead. A man darted up, ran a little way, picked up another stone, ran back, and threw it on to his rampart; then he ran off a little further, picked up another stone and came back with it and threw that, too, on his rampart. So he worked feverishly, running each time a little further afield, and for ever stooping and turning and straightening. He was for all the world like a man in a potato race. And whenever he thought it was time for the next shell he would lie quite flat behind his stones.

Pom, pom, pom, pom-pom! For the first time that day we heard the hated Vickers-Maxim. The stringing grey smoke fluttered along the little works which offered a perfect line on the open grass. When you have seen a thing like that you know why a Boer general called the British army the bravest and the stupidest in the world. Again the chain of shells came; more links were in it. The men ran back to the bushes. It was time. Could they hold the hill? Yes—reinforcements were working their way up—every minute the skyline was more thickly toothed with them. Already below the Irish Fusiliers were climbing Green Hill. The Scots Fusiliers were behind them—their pipes played them up; and an officer led his horse, and a mule with ammunition was coming too—there is not much rifle fire where horses and mules can be taken—all marching up the scarred and pock-marked side of the hill. Then up went a cheer, which some of the Middlesex and Dorsets answered across the valley. Green Hill was ours. Monte Christo was ours. The Boers were retreating. They had been fighting a rear-guard action only. "*Huis toe, huis toe*"! "home, home!"

It was time. They were tricked out of their

position in this instance. They went, nor stopped till they had crossed the river. And our loss was only 179. Our men were among the abandoned tents. Gaunt ponies, reins, saddles, Mauser cartridges, "pom-pom" shells, flour, biltong, Dutch Bibles were theirs for the taking. The valley was filled with the clatter of our field guns rushing for new positions. Would the Boers fight a rear-guard action all the way to Ladysmith; or had they another strong position across the river? High spirits assured us of the former. But never mind to-morrow. To-day is ours; we have marched round the gospel of mobility.

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLE OF RAILWAY HILL

COLENZO, *Monday, February 26th, 1900.*

MONTE CHRISTO commands Hlangwana Hill; Hlangwana commands the kopjes on the north bank of the Tugela at Colenso. Here is a sort of perfect military syllogism. When the Boers saw that we had captured the first, they were logical enough not to dispute the second and the third. They abandoned them. Hlangwana was certainly worth occupying, because it offered first-rate gun positions. The Colenso kopjes had next to be considered. Were they worth occupying? They offered no useful gun positions, and they lay out of our obvious line of march along the hills. Need they be occupied for our own security? Back to the logic, and see that the Boers thought them untenable. Why, then,

fortify them against attack when the Boers thought them not even worth defence? Now for the illogical fact. We occupied them. They lie below the great green-backed monster, Grobler's Kloof Hill. They are commanded by it. After occupying Hlangwana the army screwed sharp round the northern slopes of it to the west and dropped downwards to the river (which here flows from south to north) and the insignificant kopjes on the other side. It entered a shell-trap. We seemed to be loth to forsake our habit of looking heavenwards for the Boers.

On the evening of Monday, February 19th, two companies of the Rifle Composite Battalion, under Major Stuart-Wortley, entered Colenso, and slept there. The next morning they made room for General Hart's brigade, which sat in the village and was sniped by some Boers fearfully remaining in the kopjes just across the river. Then Thorneycroft's mounted infantry crossed the river, took the kopjes easily enough, and in the evening Colenso station was puffing with trains once again. All Tuesday and Wednesday the rival armies bandied shells, as it were, backwards and forwards across the river. Our transport

was being brought forward and clustered about Hlangwana. Imagine yourself seated on a commanding kopje somewhere on the field of battle on this or on any similar day of desultory fighting, and you are at once the overhearer of the following conversation :—

SCENE :—Two or three correspondents, some signalmen with heliographs and flags, and some officers and men, whose battalion is posted in reserve near by, are watching the fighting from the commanding kopje. The Boers are distributing shells impartially amongst our amply conspicuous battalions and transport. The shells whizz overhead. The men sit behind rocks, but keep rearing themselves up to get a better view. Our guns incessantly bombard hills where the enemy is invisible. A correspondent climbs to the top of the kopje and sits on the sky-line sketching the position. He lights a cigarette, not without conscious effrontery.

An Officer. I don't believe there are any Boers there.

Another Officer. I don't either. Wish they'd let us go forward. I'm *sick* of this sitting about.

1st Private Soldier. Here's one coming! (*A*

shell sings overhead. The men all duck behind rocks. The shell had passed already, but no matter. These men would walk through the smoke of a bursting shell in an attack without blinking. But a shell in unprofessional moments is another matter. Still, they mind shells so little that you wonder why they invariably duck their heads. Three men walking on road behind kopje fall flat. The shell has already burst near a mule train four hundred yards away. The sound sings on as though the shell were still in the air. All the men behind the rocks bob up, and the three men on the road pick themselves up, roaring with laughter.)

All. There it is! (Every one looks where the shell has burst).

2nd Private Soldier. They can't shoot for nuts!

1st P.S. Can't they! That's all! You should jest 'ave seen——

3rd P.S. (with superior knowledge). But they aren't Boers what's firing. They're Frenchmen and Germans.

2nd P.S. And Irish. You might say we ain't fighting the Boers at all. We're fighting the 'ole world. (A salvo is fired from our howitzers.)

1st P.S. My word! Ain't we giving 'em

socks up there! I should think they're getting pretty well fed up with them things.

Several Voices. 'Ere's another! (*A shell sings overhead and plumps down among some waggons. Nearly all the men stand up to see what has happened.*)

Officer. Keep your heads down there!

1st P.S. Do you think they'll give us a bit 'ere?

2nd P.S. You wait!

3rd P.S. We must 'ave silenced most of their guns by now.

2nd P.S. We've blown two of 'em right up in the air to-day.

3rd P.S. Ah! Perhaps they won't be able to fire any more soon.

1st P.S. The Boers is getting more dis'eartened every day. There's 'undreds deserting and going to their 'omes. Why, they've got nothing to eat, only mealies and little bits of dried-up beef!

3rd P.S. 'Ow do you know?

1st P.S. I read it in the papers.

An Officer. Keep down there! (*The sound of a Boer shell enforces the command.*)

A Colonial Waggon-driver. I always said they

were cowards—the Boers. You see—one beating and they'll all clear. They can't stand up. Why don't they come out and fight? They daren't come into the open.

A Correspondent. They seem to manage it pretty well as it is.

The Colonial. I've lived here ten years and I know the Boers, and I tell you they're cowards.

Correspondent. All right! (*Our bombardment grows in strength.*)

1st P.S. They must 'ave lost terrible 'eavy to-day.

2nd P.S. You bet they 'ave. They say the effects of lyddite is 'orrible.

An Officer. Why the deuce do the gunners keep on firing at the side of that hill? You can see there isn't anybody there.

Another Officer. They like firing at South Africa. (*A party of infantry reconnoitres up to base of hills at which gunners are firing. Sound of musketry pops out. It swells to a heavy rattle. Reconnoitrers are seen falling back under hot fire. Night falls.*)

I imagine that Sir Redvers Buller's reason for leaving the hills, turning west, and crossing the

river near Colenso was that he thought it would be more difficult to bridge the river elsewhere. On the afternoon of Wednesday, February 21st, the pontoons were floated on the river, swung nose to stream, jerked and strained at their moorings, and were stationary at regular intervals like a line of deployed infantry. The planks were laid across and the infantry began to walk over. The Somersets and Middlesex—of General Talbot Coke's brigade—and the Lancaster Regiment were the first over. Once again we had crossed the Tugela.

Already it was evening. The battalions marched up to the slopes of Grobler's Kloof Hill, partly to reconnoitre, partly to attract the enemy's attention while the rest of the army filled the low land about the river. They did not advance far, but the bullets spat among them. Some field guns were hurried across the bridge; the limbers seemed to fall in halves, the horses drew back, and in a moment there were six guns squatting in a row and pointing their noses up in the air. Shrapnel spattered among the bushes which cling to the side of Grobler's. The Boers must have been there, but we could see no one. When dark

came the Somersets alone had lost nearly a hundred men. A pretty rear-guard action on the part of the Boers certainly!

Thursday was the ninth day of the fighting and the first serious day in the shell-trap. Two naval guns and a battery of howitzers were placed on a neck which joined the two kopjes just across the pontoon bridge. A howitzer fired and waited. The answer came. A shell buzzed down somewhere from the skies, and a geyser shot up in front of the battery. All our guns leaped to the rescue and fumed back. It was a comprehensive bombardment when we prepared to attack the kopjes on our front which were not yet ours and probed the recesses of Grobler's on our left flank. It is said that we silenced some Boer guns. That means that the Boer gunners walked away from their guns for a time when the ground began to rock under their feet; but the guns were not hurt, and their tongues were loosed again soon enough. At 1.30 p.m. the infantry stirred on their kopjes, stood up, twinkled into formations, and faced their front. Lines drew across the kopjes, and edged more and more across till they were perfectly deployed. Then they started over a

broken sea of country. It was like all advances of British infantry, steady and unquestioning. I remember one deep trough in this frozen sea, where the shells fell again and again. The road lay through it, and guns and ammunition trains must all pass that way. The shells seemed to come regularly, and you could almost calculate where the moving column would be punctuated with death. Once an officer riding a horse was on the spot when the shell came. The ground sprang up round him. It was shrapnel this time. He had been cantering.

Now he stopped, soothed his horse in the dust, and then no longer cantered but walked with measured dignity, for his men marched behind him. The South Lancashires were in the firing line, then came the Lancasters, the 3rd 60th Rifles, and the Rifle Composite Battalion; and Coke's and Hildyard's brigades—indeed all the infantry, were couched in readiness behind, straining to be forward. On pitched the skirmishing lines up and down over the rugged sea of kopjes, now hidden in troughs now rising on crests. It was useless to count the waves. The last one reached was a long green-back, a

mile long, which rolled and tumbled in smaller fragments up to the base of the high hills. The infantry lay down on the back of this hill, and you would have said that they had perfect cover; holding parties had been shed on the kopjes along all the line of the advance. The Boers wait till you think it is all over and then they begin. Some of their riflemen must have crept round the west shoulder of the long-backed kopje on the back of which our men were lying, for the bullet-driven dust jumped about them where they lay. The men could not lie flat enough to the hill. They laid their heads behind insignificant stones. What an irony in this rock-strewn country!

Where was the fire coming from? Most of it probably from the high slopes of Grobler's, which now lay all along our left flank; and accordingly the fifteen-pounders drubbed and flayed the bushes with shrapnel. On all the kopjes we were losing men. The East Surreys were ordered forward to reinforce the 60th Rifles, and they helped them with such spirit to maintain the passive strife—the business, you might say, of using the flesh of men to resist the bullets of the enemy—that they were praised afterwards by the general and thanked by

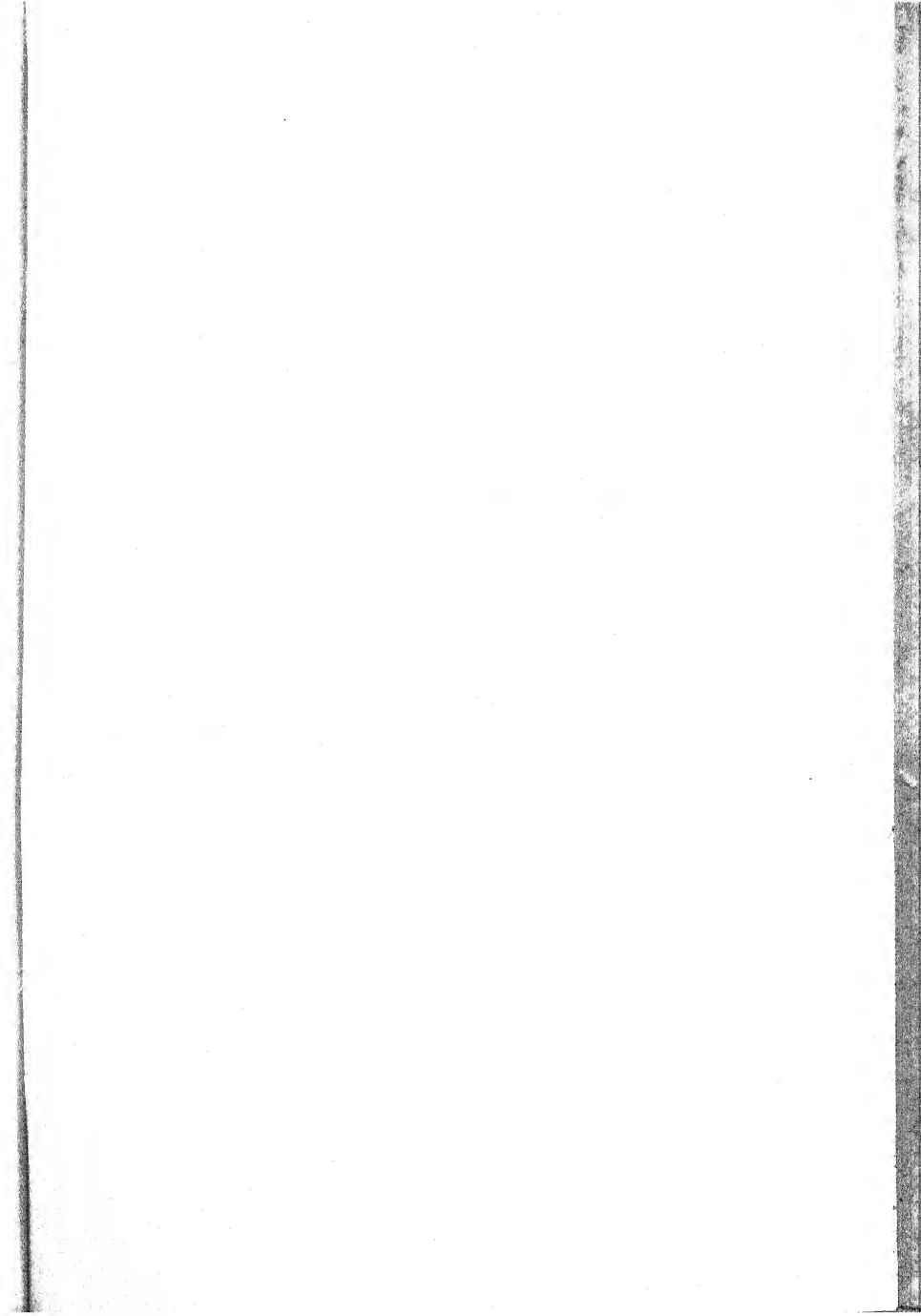
the 60th Rifles. In the night the Boers moved their guns about near the clouds, and on Friday, February 23rd the shell-trap was complete. The missiles sang down from their eyries with the note of swans flying high overhead at night.

The pastoral gunners fired with notable accuracy and impartiality. Not a kopje but had its infantry, bivouacked in square patches, as is the way of British infantry, and not a kopje but got its shell. Now one came squarely into a patch, and—miracle of miracles!—no harm was done; or perhaps in a similar case the doctor ran to the smoke and called up the hill to where the officers sat that two men had their legs off. Once a single shrapnel killed eight men. Another shell fell among some officers at tea, and when the confusion drifted away only a coat lay on the ground gored and worried as by a wild animal. Other shells were fired at the pontoon bridge, others skimmed over a kopje where guns were and fell in the hospital camp. Two tents were hit, and the hospital was put further back. Sometimes shrapnel fell among loose horses, and the animals started back at this strange snake in the grass, but seeing nothing more went on feeding

peacefully. Then came another shrapnel, and a horse lay kicking on the ground and two others limped off head to knee as though they were knee-haltered. Animals are a vital and necessary place in which to wound your enemy; but—heavens!—it is horrible.

The Colenso kopjes gave a curiously faithful notion of Boer habits of defence. The south sides of them had belonged to the shells of our naval guns; the north sides had belonged to the Boers. The Boers had built themselves rabbit warrens in which they might live serenely. While the south side, had smoked with countless bombardments the Boers had smoked on the other side in their bomb-proof dens. I found a cavern in which was an iron bedstead. The kopjes were littered with the remains of slaughtered animals and nauseous filth. But the Boers had not lived badly either. The stories about mealie pap and little of that to eat were the merest nonsense, told by the flattering tongues of prisoners and Kaffirs. Here were sardines, tinned meats, dried fruits, ham, potatoes, onions. A letter was found from a field-cornet, desiring that another field-cornet should use his influence to

see that the first field-cornet's commando should have a share of the fresh mutton which had just come into the laager, as the whole commando earnestly wished for a change from the long monotony of fresh beef. There was a profusion of letters on the ground. In scarcely one was there anything but indirect mention of the war. Say you picked one up at random in a little schantz where the earth was worn smooth and concave by the body of the man who had lain there day in day out—a man who had probably tempered his boredom by reading this same letter hundreds of times. Jan writes to Stoffel: "*Dear Brother*,—God has been pleased to spare me. I hope it is also well with you. I have news from our home. The farm is well, and the corn is becoming good, and the Kaffirs are working as well as can be expected, but Klaas needs flogging. We have had much rain here. Christian and Jacobus hope you continue to be well. May God spare you till we meet, brother.—Your affectionate JAN." Some women's clothes were lying about the place. But with it all the impression that prevailed on one's mind was that of filth. Here was a camp belonging to a nation of strong stomachs.



On Friday, February 23rd, the shelling and the sniping had no cessation. It was the tenth consecutive day of fighting. Each new day of fighting the sense of weariness grew in geometrical progression. The sense on my part was merely vicarious. The infantry were now lying out at nights without even their greatcoats. And all Thursday night the musketry had continued, sometimes just popping, sometimes swelling to a cataract of sound. The relentlessness of the thing struck into one's soul as something horrible. What was this swaying tumult, lasting all through a black night in which none could see his hand in front of him? Probably blind firing, prompted by the suspicion of one man and nervously courted and acted on by others, till miles of trenches were set flashing at nothing. It was 1.30 p.m. on Friday when the infantry swung out to a new attack. Hart's brigade was off along the river and the railway. Railway Hill on our right front was to be attacked—a sort of twin hill with a neck joining the two humps. On the humps were conspicuous trenches, but there were trenches on the neck too. It was a high hill, higher than anything we were holding; it was quite one of the Boer

ramparts—a strategical hill that lay between us and Ladysmith. Now for it. It was a bad-looking business, but we must have that hill. The infantry moved under the bank of the river, then they came to a place where they must climb up the bank and cross a railway bridge over a spruit which is a tributary of the Tugela. A Boer “pom-pom” was trained on the bridge. The thin brown line of bent, hurrying figures unreeled itself across the span. The bridge was hard to hit and the scattering shells splashed in the river beyond. A few burst on the water and flirted the spray about. It was a pretty and harmless entertainment. Soon the infantry deployed and moved across an open piece of land. The foot of Railway Hill was reached. A party was formed to storm the hill. There were the Inniskilling Fusiliers, four companies of the Dublins, and four companies of the Connaughts. And now it was evening. You know those clear, rare evenings when there is a wonderful light along the lower skies—a light clearer than the broadest sunlight, although dusk already comes upon you. It was one of those evenings. Every tooth in the jagged stone trenches on Railway Hill showed black and hard and clearly

cut against the sky. Field guns and naval guns on the northernmost of the long, trailing spurs of Hlangwana were flinging shrapnel and lyddite at these trenches.

Sometimes three shells struck at once, and a mixture of trench and shell and earth, and perhaps of men, would fly up in black fragments against the sky. The Boers stood in their deep trenches—for some they were perpendicular coffins—and peeped over at the attackers. The Inniskillings advanced; it was time for the Boers to fire; it was now or never, shells or no shells. The Boers drew themselves up in the trenches, their heads bobbed against the sky. They watched the flashes on the Hlangwana spur and ducked to the shells. Still the Inniskillings, the Dublins, and the Connaughts came on. And now followed the most frantic battle-piece that I have ever seen. Night soon snatched it away, but for the time it lasted it was a frenzy, a nightmare. Boer heads and elbows shot up and down, up and down; the defenders were aiming, firing, and ducking; and all the trenches danced madly against the sky. The first few thin lines of the Inniskillings sank down like cut grass. Their places refilled; still the attackers came on.

Two or three Boers stood up on the trenches ; and now all forgot to duck. Some one in the trenches appeared to be handing up loaded rifles. Still the attackers hurried on and fell or staggered forward over the stony ground, and the dusk received them on the brown hillside long before the trenches on the sky were blotted out. The attackers reached what they had believed was the highest point, and behold there was another point—the real crest—four hundred yards further. There always is. Thus men learn geography in South Africa with their lives. It was impossible to reach the top.

The attackers sullenly retired some way down the hill and built themselves a stonework. There they stayed till the morning and made another attack—useless ! The most damaging fire had for a long time been coming from the flanks. This might be swamped by reinforcements. But where were the reinforcements ? The party on the hill were expecting two and a half battalions. It was seven o'clock in the morning now and not a sign of them coming. What was to be done ? The colonel of the Inniskillings—Colonel Thackray, who had argued with some Boers at the battle of Colenso when they proclaimed him a prisoner, and

ingeniously convinced them that they were making a mistake—was dead. Both his majors were dead. A captain commanded the regiment. What was to be done? It was decided to retire, and that none too soon.

The exultant and pressing enemy opened a heavier cross-fire than ever, and harried the retirement home to its last step. Lieut.-Colonel Sitwell, of the Dublins, was one of the last officers to start down the hill; he was trying to make the retirement even steadier than it was. He was as deliberate now as ever; and when a bullet (one of several that touched him) hit him fatally, it found him a ready sacrifice to a refinement of military appearances. The night before, General Hart had said that the manner of Sitwell's advance with two companies of the Dublins had given a fillip to the whole attack. Thus died one of the two (I think) survivors from that handful of officers who went through the four years' fighting of the Uganda rising. General Hart did not renew the attack that day, but some of the Durhams were sent up to reoccupy the stonework made during Friday night. They could live there with precautions, and that was all. They

shared their shelter with dead and dying men. Further up the hill the bodies lay thicker. The bullets kept up an assiduous traffic above them.

All day I sat on a high rocky place above a cascade of the Tugela, and looked down on to the foot of Railway Hill, which begins to rise immediately across the river. In the river above the cascade was a platform of black and dripping rocks, half exposed, and the cascade seemed like the receding of the tide from a rocky coast. Above the rocks was a slight foot-bridge built by the Boers, and our men passed to and fro on it all day. They did not pass unconsidered ; I could see the bullets snatching up the water. I could see the bodies lying on Railway Hill. Some lay under the soldier's strip of yellow waterproof sheet, just as they had been left by the comrades who would risk more than a Boer flanking fire to linger behind and perform a cherished act of sentiment. At least once I plainly saw a man move up there ; he was trying to crawl down the hill under that dangerously low roof of bullets. And one man actually did urge himself with hands and feet down the hill on his back, but it took him from morning to night to do it. Others lay quite still all day,

and yet there was life in many of those yellow limp heaps, and I wondered which were dead men and which alive. Was it impossible to help them? Let a man just show himself and he was not disposed to argue at that moment about the accuracy of Boer fire. Why, even our artillery could not afford to let the hill alone that day, but must beat down the fire with shells, and when the shelling ceased, the musketry flared up again, as flames do when the beaters cease their work.

In the morning the wounded lay in the heat, and in the afternoon—which was perhaps better—in the rain. It was real South African rain, threshing off the whole top skin of the country; and when it had lasted half an hour the land was changed as a negative is developed under the chemicals; unsuspected roads gleamed on the brown hills where nothing had been before, and tracks and fibres were discovered and displayed as clearly as in ice which has begun to thaw. Wounded men, dripping bundles, were being carried to hospitals at the rear; the bearers themselves were small cascades of water.

“Which is the way to the Sixth Brigade?”

“I don’t know; but it’s somewhere back there, about two miles.”

And so on and on for two miles the reeling, lopsided bearers sustaining the weight, went over the shiny mud. The rain had ceased before I got back to my camp ; men who had hugged to themselves chips of dry wood were lighting their evening fires, and on all the kopjes began to sit under quiet panoplies of blue smoke. It was a cool, still night, and the stars were out ; but the rain had not washed away the memory of that hill as I saw it between two fires. A charming fellow sat outside my tent and sang cheery snatches on a banjo, which made one of the most violent assaults on my feelings that I can call to mind. That was the end of the eleventh consecutive day of fighting.

Nearly all Sunday there was an armistice. Sixty bodies were buried on Railway Hill. British soldiers and Boers came out of their trenches and talked amiably together—a proceeding which seems natural enough when you have conquered the vulgar superstition that soldiers and politicians are at deadly enmity as private persons. The exultant enemy was inclined indulgently to admit that, on the whole, he had had a rough time. But General Lyttelton was far too humorous to accept the indulgence.

"A rough time?" said he, to two Boers. "Yes—I suppose so. But for us, of course, it is nothing. We are used to it, and we are well paid for it. This is what we are paid for. This is the life we lead always—you understand."

"Great God!" said the listening Boers.

"Why not?" went on the General. "This is our life whether we are at Aldershot, or in India, or wherever we are. We are just beginning to settle down to this campaign."

It was a general who spoke. The Boers stared at him.

"Great God!" they said again, reduced to simplicity.

I met a highly intelligent Englishman on this day of armistice who farms a large piece of country in the Transvaal. He turned away with a sigh after talking to some Boer elders.

"It is delightful," said he, "to chat with these people again after the *stupidity* of an English camp."

"You like the Boers, then?" I asked.

"I miss their little jokes," he said; "they are never without their little jokes."

"You are anxious to be back?"

"Rather!"

"Then you didn't approve of this war?"

"I was pining for it for years."

"But why?"

"Because it was not possible to live any longer with the Boers as things were."

Apparently we have to adjust a racial relationship of an unduly fantastical character.

On Railway Hill the officers had bloodshot eyes and voices that trailed with weariness. I understood that we had knocked our heads against a hard wall; the officers did not disguise their belief in its hardness; with the same trailing voices they told me how some of the wounded had lain thirty-six hours on Railway Hill. I said to myself, "If the Boers were fighting a rear-guard action after Monte Christo they have now been encouraged to bring their whole force back. They are on the old hills again—merely a little further east—and we stand in the old relationship to them." And in that moment I fell into a chasm of despair. I did not know then that it had been decided to leave the shell-trap and get back on to the hills that strike into the west from Monte Christo. Nor did I understand even then the indomitable qualities, the

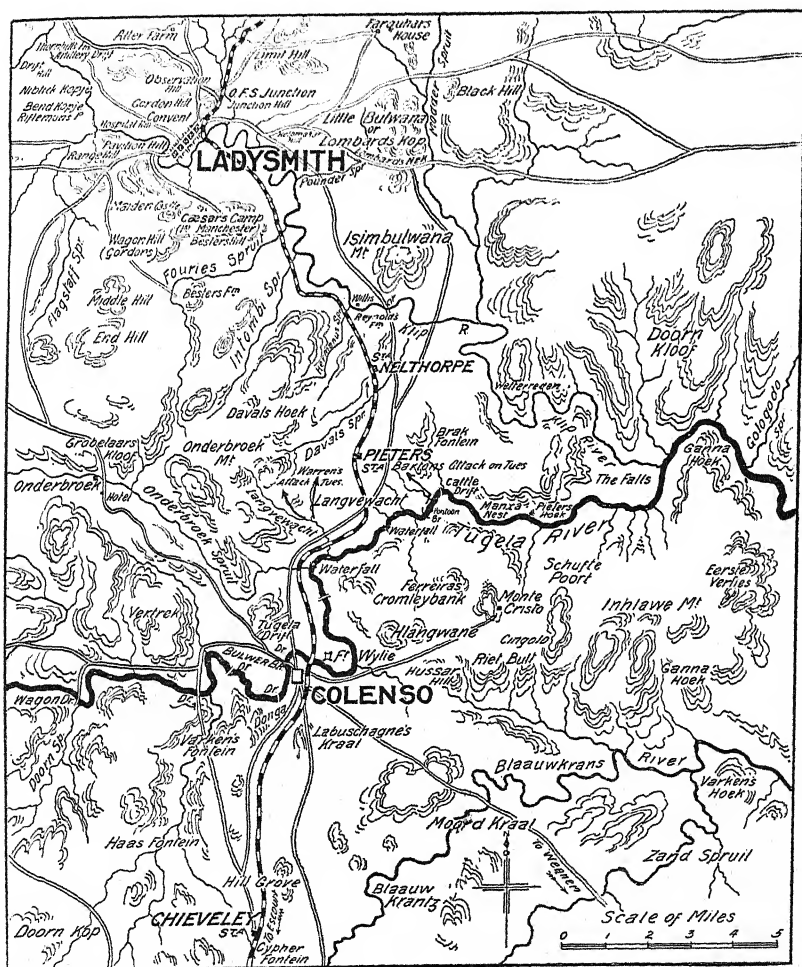
instant power of renewing their spirits with each new plan, possessed by British infantry. Now I know the truth—that when our soldiers have failed, and failed, and failed again they are not further from success than they were at the beginning.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BATTLE OF PIETER'S AND THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH

LADYSMITH, *Saturday, March 3, 1900.*

THE Tugela seemed to be ten thousand times in flood; never before had it such a mighty rushing voice. The Rifle Composite Battalion (reservists of the Rifle Brigade and the 60th Rifles, with ten years' service at their backs almost to a man) and the Border Regiment were firing across the deep, narrow valley at the bottom of which the river runs. All the Maxims the battalions had between them were firing too till the water round the barrels boiled and boiled again; the Colts added their deep, deliberate rapping; and the river, drawing it all down, gave an impressive resonance to the continuous sweeping roar. It was February 27th, and the hills east of Railway



DISTRICT BETWEEN COLENSO AND LADYSMITH



Hill were being prepared for an attack. As I rode across the plateau east of Hlangwana I discovered guns in new positions pointing at hills which had always stood serenely outside the conflict.

The signs of battle are not to be mistaken; as you ride towards the fighting they become more and more suggestive till they culminate in the end and meaning of them all—the death and mutilation of men. First you find groups of unprotected commissariat waggons waiting for the order to go forward, ready loaded; then, perhaps, a hospital—for you are still in the area where tents are allowed—then a column of infantry marching in mass, for this place is outside the range of the enemy's guns; then, further on, an ammunition train, but this is sheltering behind a kopje; then infantry supports, limbers, and limber teams, all hidden behind hills—visible to you, invisible from the front, so that the whole field is arranged on the plan of one of those advertisements which appear quite different from different sides. Last stage of all, you are abreast or in front of the guns in action and among extended lines.

It was battle again, and this was the plan of

it :—We were to take the hills east of Railway Hill. These lay beyond the strong Boer line of defence, and if we took them (some of them would need scarcely more than to be occupied) we should have high hills on which to put guns and a hill from which to flank Railway Hill. The thought of taking Railway Hill was not given up ; the hill was to be the pivot of the attack, and both a frontal and a flank attack from the east were to be made that day. Now what the Composite Battalion and the Borders were doing was to send a dropping fire across the river on to all the threatened hills. There may not have been many Boers on them, and as usual we could see none, but if you drop lead, as the two battalions seemed to be doing, on to a large part of South Africa you are bound, at least, to inconvenience some one. All this time the attacking battalions were creeping in one long thin line (their legs moving like those of a monstrous centipede) along the north bank of the river, which here flows again from west to east. Below the cascade a pontoon bridge had been newly built at a place discovered by Colonel Sandbach.

The disposition was as follows : Colonel Nor-

cott's brigade, consisting, for the day, of the Durham Light Infantry, the Rifle Brigade, the East Surreys, and half a battalion of the Scottish Rifles, attacked Railway Hill in front. Colonel Kitchener's brigade, consisting, for the day, of his own regiment, the West Yorks, the South Lancashires, the Royal Lancaster, and York and Lancaster, attacked the next hill to the east, and also made a flank attack on Railway Hill. General Barton, with the Scots Fusiliers, Irish Fusiliers, and Dublin Fusiliers, attacked Pieter's Hill on Kitchener's right.

General Barton's infantry, stepping high because of the rocks, must have moved a couple of miles under the river bank ; skirmishers as scouts peered ahead into the bush and beckoned on the rest, and the body drew itself up to the head, and then the head went on again till the whole force drew up below Pieter's Hill. From bottom to top the business seemed to occupy a fragment of time. You could hardly wink, as it seemed to me, before there were the front rank men showing strangely big against the sky, and the gunners, had they been less sharp, might easily have mistaken them for Boers. It is bewildering, in any case, to follow

your own men in the wide, modern field of battle, and the position of the General, who has so much to remember and so many levers to work, is like that of the signalman at Clapham Junction.

Once more by going far enough we had marched round the enemy. It all seemed so brief an exploit, and it was so quiet in the performance that you had to think hard to remember that this was success—something that advanced the campaign more than all the tempestuous unsuccess of a Railway Hill or a Spion Kop. But to-day Railway Hill was to see another sight.

I never saw infantry strain at the leash as they strained this day. The renaissance of confidence and power and spirit and dash was complete. It was Majuba Day; the attack had been planned dramatically. None could say that it was planned vindictively by Sir Redvers Buller, who has a nice appreciation of the ridiculous military importance which the inconsiderable affair of Majuba Hill has acquired from the proximity of a political arrangement. But the private soldier has a strong sense of what is elementarily dramatic; and the General who has lives to save as well as to take would be wrong to neglect any one of the mediums through

which he can work. On this day, too, the troops had been told that General Cronje had surrendered unconditionally, and one had traced the passage of the news as the squib of cheering and commotion spluttered along the lines.

On the hill to the east of Railway Hill the infantry were already sitting near the top. It was theirs at their discretion. Only the difficult assault of Railway Hill remained. The East Surreys and the Rifle Brigade in front and the South Lancashires on the east had all crept up to a certain point. The South Lancashires lay on the near slope of the railway bank; if you had not seen them go there you would have said that they were heaps of ballast shot at intervals. If a man put his head above the line the track flew up in dust. A mere handful of men squirmed over the line and chose their rocks on the other side. It was well, and they were a few yards further, but that did not make the taking of Railway Hill much the nearer. Another handful and another crept across. But still was it not critical? How were they to cross that ghastly open hillside?

I was still thinking it was critical, and it was

nearly five o'clock. And then came the most extraordinary revolution, sudden, astounding, brilliant, almost incomprehensible. Across the railway the South Lancashires suddenly rose up out of the ground, stones rose up too, and turned out to be infantrymen—more must have passed over than I had counted—and all began to run, not in stiff lines, but with the graceful spreading of a bird's wings straight up the hill. Splendid, and always new is the rush of British infantry, but had not the Inniskillings done this before? Would this gain the hill now, that had not been gained before? I waited, stricken with admiration and suspense. And then another revolution happened. Further on the right of Railway Hill came a second rush of infantry out of invisibility, or at least, from the unobserved and wholly unexpected, and it converged on the first careering body. On a small stony kopje on the lower slopes of Railway Hill the sweeping wave broke.

Two trenches were there—Boer trenches. And now out of the trenches and down the back of the kopje ran black figures—speeding before the infantry, outstripping them. I had never seen a

Boer run like this in the open before. Out of one trench an arm—just an arm—appeared waving a shirt or a towel—a grotesque of the arm that grasped Excalibur. Some soldiers stooped over the trenches—prisoners were made—and then on after the rest of the wave which had split on the kopje and mended itself again. The whole party joined the men who had charged on their left. The assault on Railway Hill was doubled. Up and up and up the South Lancashires went, seeming to drive and haul themselves up the side of the hill with arms and heads and legs. Now one man was on the top-most trench and waving his helmet on his bayonet, and down the sharp, stony, foot-destroying descent on the other side went a headlong, heedless flight of Boers.

Shrapnel whipped and stung them home. On foot they went ; there was no time to snatch their horses, or perhaps, as some say, their horses were, most of them, dead, or, again, had been taken away from them. On the trenches I could see a bayonet jabbing here and there ; but for the most part the men pointed their rifles till hands were thrown up, and in a few minutes nearly sixty Boer prisoners were being led down to the river.

"I bayoneted that man," a soldier said, pointing to a prisoner, and here he rehearsed the appropriate action.

"Did you hurt him much?" some one asked.

"Oh, no," was the answer, "I bayoneted him as gently as I could. And I gave him water, too; he had more than I did. Ah, I told him he was a lucky man to fall across *me*."

Up the slopes of Railway Hill supports now walked as leisurely as though the place had always belonged to us; the low, evening sun glittered on their front, and their backs were as black as the backs of silvery fishes. On every part of the hill troops climbed up into the sun and a golden, splendid property. On all the hills in front of me British troops bristled. A sudden realisation of the victory swept over the field; there was a cessation, almost a silence; guns no longer crashed; and then from some part of the field there came a little unaided cheer, that asked assistance. Assistance came; cheer answered cheer, backwards and forwards across the river, till all cheers became the same cheer, and staff officers forgot that they were not as ordinary officers and threw up their helmets and shook

hands with one another. No one minded that the Boer gunners were throwing a dying flare of shells on to our hills. The night was on us, and that is the time to build entrenchments. Never was an attack better timed.

The next morning we had to look to the Dundee road for Boers. There they went, a long line trekking north. We stared across the open country that reaches to solid Umbulwana, familiar yet new, and felt that it was a matter of hours to relieve Ladysmith. The hills on which we stood were sown and scorched with our own shells; trees were stripped and scoured and smashed; sixteen Boers were dead in one trench; some boys, and some old, old men and two women were among the dead (I had a qualm for the victory then), and all the trenches and littered clothes were covered with the peculiar noxious yellow substance of lyddite. It would be insulting to our own success to say that the Boers who had stood for days in that nauseous welter of death were anything but the bravest of brave men.

On Wednesday evening, February 28th, some of the Natal Carbineers, the Natal Police, and the Imperial Light Horse reconnoitred as far as Lady-

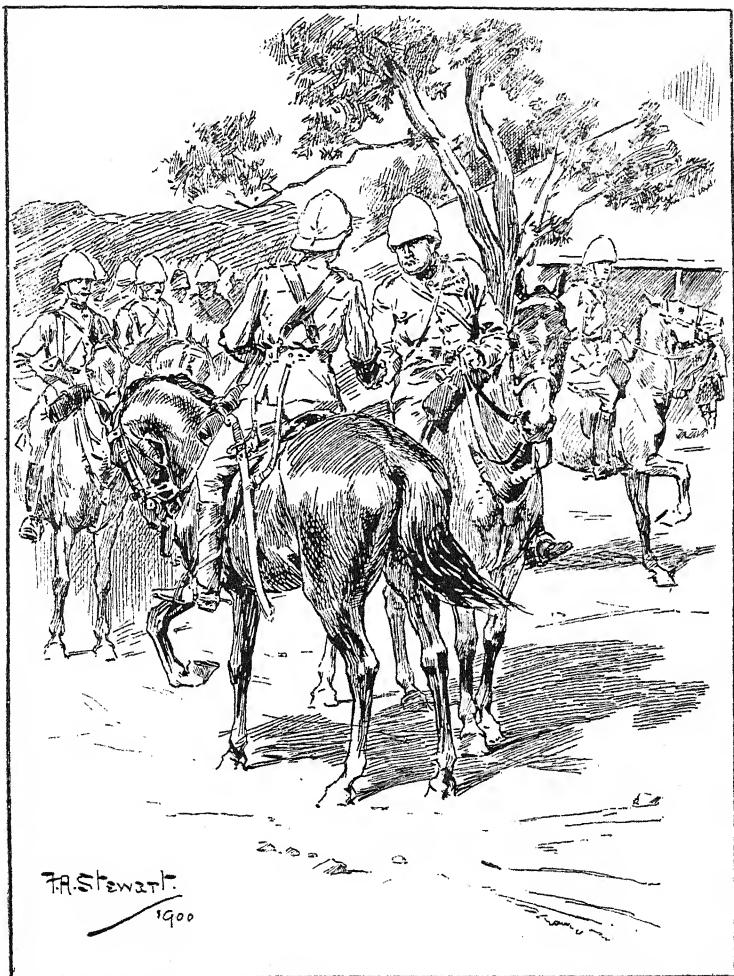
smith, and finding no opposition entered the town. Colonel Rhodes and others were watching from one of the Ladysmith hills and saw them coming.

"They are Boers," said some one.

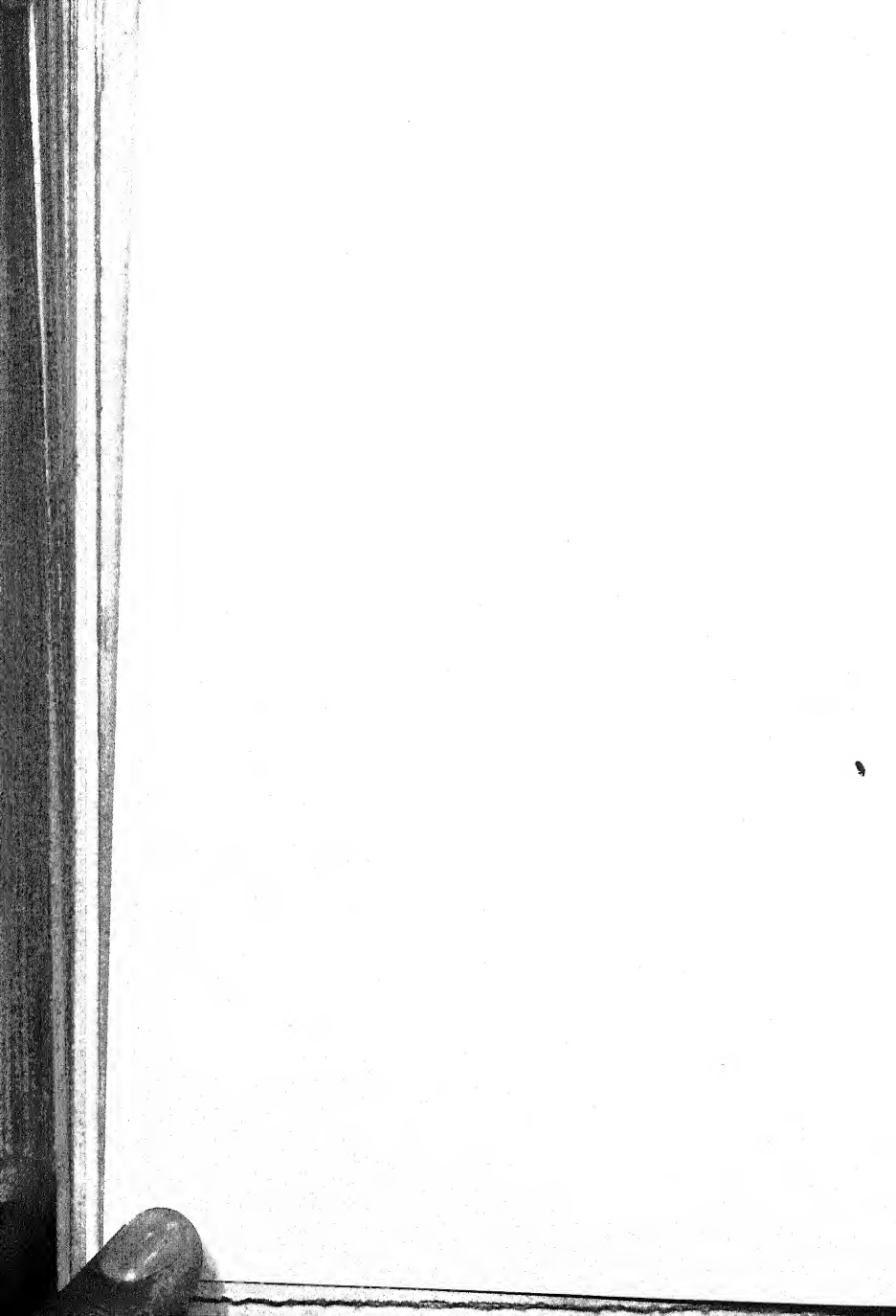
"If they are," said Colonel Rhodes, "they have become remarkably like our men."

As the horsemen approached the truth became clear. The town resounded with excitement. Rations had just been reduced a little further ; the relief was unexpected ; no one knew that the Boers had all gone, so silently and skilfully had they managed to creep away.

I rode into Ladysmith the next morning. I expected, frankly, a scene that would be some tax on the emotions. I remembered the words of a soldier who had said the day before, "I suppose when we get in there we shall all be hugging one another for joy." Probably the enthusiasm and the emotion had spent themselves the night before ; an English frenzy has at best a short life. I know that when I rode in I found people of ordinary countenance surveying an ordinary situation. I have been greeted with as much ardour in the afternoon in London by a man with whom I had lunched two hours before. The garrison were a



MEETING OF GENERAL BULLER AND GENERAL WHITE IN LADYSMITH



little inclined to be angry with us for having taken so long to reach them.

I overheard the greeting of one distinguished general to another.

"Well, how have you been getting on?" asked the besieged one.

"All right, thanks," was the answer, and a temporary silence followed. For a short time I was disappointed. Then I found half the explanation.

"Two months ago," said the officer, "the thing was a strain, but we got over that. Two months ago we were enthusiastic when we heard you were coming, but we got over that. Two months ago——" so he went on. Why, of course! What can a man do, or think, or feel on quarter rations when his skin begins "to tighten over his bones." I felt as though I were in a place as unsubstantial as a shadow land—gaunt men greeted one with wisps of smiles without violence of feeling, gaunt grooms combed gaunt artillery horses with the husks of the old assiduity. As for the garrison "cutting their way out," in the exhilarating phrase, there was not a company of infantry that could march a mile and a half, and not a horse that could pull a gun three miles without dropping.

This is the natural explanation of this gentle end, like the quiet breathing away of a life, to a splendidly endured siege. And for the rest the demeanour of the garrison was found to be so admirably English, so characteristic of Englishmen who had fought a siege in an English manner, that on reflection my disappointment at the lack of the expected and the poignant become richly endeared to me.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TABLE OF DATES

1899.

- OCT. 10.—Boer Ultimatum received in London.
12.—The Boers invade Natal.
14.—Sir Redvers Buller leaves England for the Cape.
20.—The Boers defeated at Dundee; General Symons mortally wounded.
21.—The Boers defeated at Elandslaagte.
22.—British retreat from Dundee begins.
24.—Boers checked at Rietfontein.
26.—Dundee column arrives at Ladysmith.
30.—British reverse at Farquhar's Farm and disaster at Nicholson's Nek. Naval Brigade arrives at Ladysmith.
31.—Sir Redvers Buller lands at Cape Town.
- NOV. 2.—Ladysmith surrounded; Colenso abandoned.
9.—Attack on Ladysmith repulsed.
11.—Mobilisation of Sir Charles Warren's Division ordered.
15.—Estcourt armoured train disaster.
21.—Estcourt surrounded and Mooi River camp shelled.
23.—Action at Willow Grange.
25.—The Boers fall back on the Tugela.
27.—Sir Redvers Buller arrives at Pietermaritzburg.
- DEC. 10.—Sortie by the Ladysmith garrison.

1900.

- DEC. 15.—Sir Redvers Buller defeated at Colenso.
- JAN. 6.—Ladysmith repels a desperate assault.
11.—Buller seizes Potgieter's Drift.
17.—Warren crosses the Tugela.
23.—Spion Kop captured by the British ; Gen. Woodgate mortally wounded
24.—Spion Kop abandoned.
25-27.—Warren retires across the Tugela.
- FEB. 5.—British recross the Tugela and storm Vaal Krantz.
7.—British evacuate Vaal Krantz and retire across the Tugela again.
14.—Lord Dundonald seizes Hussar Hill.
18.—The British capture Monte Christo and Green Hill.
19.—The Boers retreat across the Tugela.
20.—The British reoccupy Colenso.
21.—The British cross the Tugela below Colenso.
22.—Continuous fighting.
23.—Irish Brigade assaults Pieter's (Railway) Hill.
24.—The assault renewed and repelled.
25.—An armistice for burying the dead.
26.—Buller withdraws his guns and baggage across the Tugela and recrosses at another place.
27.—Buller attacks the main Boer position : Barton's Brigade assaults and carries Pieter's (Railway) Hill.
28.—The Boers abandon their positions. Lord Dundonald and the Natal Carabineers reach Ladysmith.
- MAR. 1.—Sir Redvers Buller enters the relieved town.

APPENDIX B

BRITISH LOSSES IN THE NATAL CAMPAIGN

TABLE OF CASUALTIES ISSUED BY THE WAR OFFICE ON
MARCH 27, 1900.

Casualties in Action. Name of Engagement.	Killed.		Wounded.		Died of Wounds (Included in (Wounded.))		Missing and Prisoners.*	
	Officers.	N. C. O.'s and Men.	Officers.	N. C. O.'s and Men.	Officers.	N. C. O.'s and Men.	Officers.	N. C. O.'s and Men.
Total casualties reported up to and including March 24, 1900								
Colenso, December 15, 1899	7	125	48	722	2	20	21	207
Dundee, October 20, 1899	8	40	14	84	3	..	25	306
Elandslaagte, October 21, 1899..	5	50	30	169	..	4	..	4
Farquhar's Farm and Nichol- son's Nek, October 30, 1899 ..	6	54	9	231	..	3	43	906†
Ladysmith, Relief of, February 14 to 27, 1900	23	264	90	1,770	3	67	1	33
Monte Christo (Colenso), &c., February 15 to 18, 1900	1	13	8	155	..	..	..	2
Potgieter's Drift, Feb. 5 to 7, 1900	2	23	18	326	..	8	..	5
Rietfontein, October 24, 1899....	1	11	6	98	..	3	..	2
Spion Kop, &c., Jan. 17 to 24, 1900	27	246	53	1,056	5	36	7	340
Willow Grange, Nov. 23, 1899 ..	..	11	1	66	..	2	1	8
At Ladysmith during invest- ment—								
Battle of January 6, 1900	14	143	31	228	4	18	..	2
Other casualties	5	55	29	215	2	23	..	9

During the same period the Field Force in South Africa lost 39 officers and 1,168 men who died of disease, three officers and 29 men who were accidentally killed, and 193 officers and 3,811 men who were sent home as invalids. A large proportion of these losses fell upon the forces in Natal.

* A complete list of prisoners has not been obtained.

† Including the missing men of Royal Irish Fusiliers numbers not reported, but estimated at 442.

APPENDIX C

THE BATTLE OF COLENZO

(a) On p. 154 it is said that the Generals, on evidence thought to be trustworthy, believed the hills opposite Colenso to be weakly held by the enemy. I have since learned that General Buller was not ignorant of the Boer strength. But he came to the conclusion that to cross the Tugela at any other point would be equally difficult.

(b) General Buller's wound at Colenso was caused by a fragment of shell which bruised his ribs badly. It was not a slight bullet wound as stated on p. 174.

J. B. A.

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